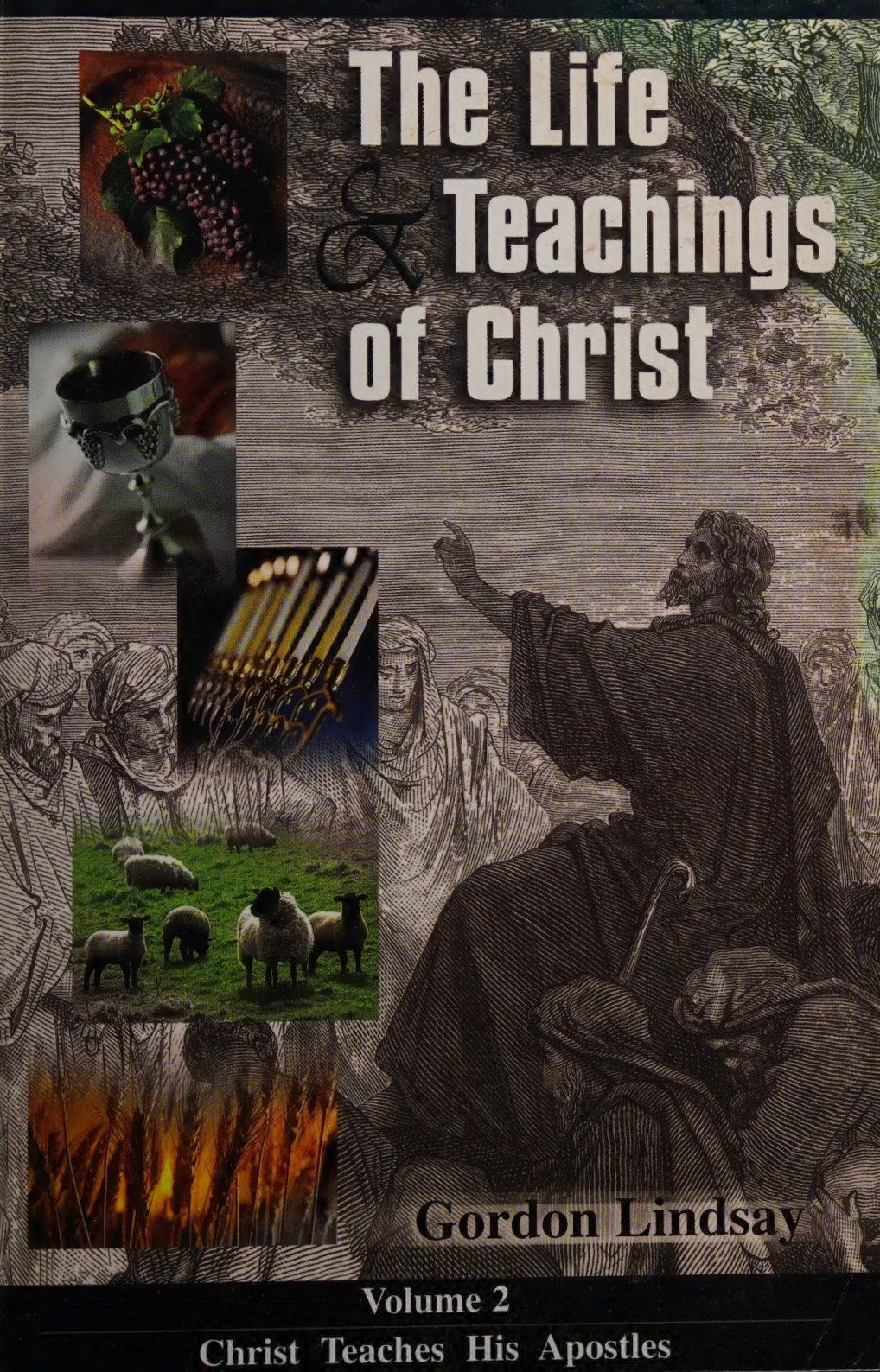
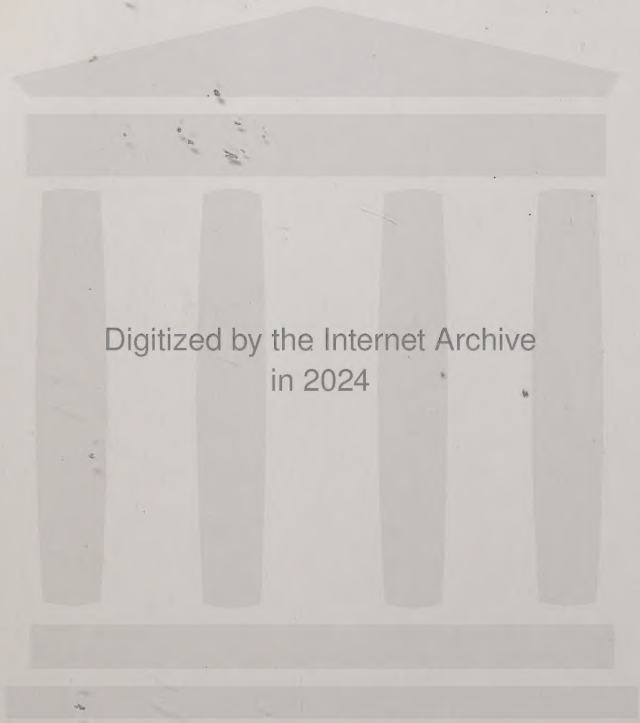


The Life & Teachings of Christ

Gordon Lindsay

Volume 2

Christ Teaches His Apostles



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The Life & Teachings of Christ

Volume 2

Christ Teaches His Apostles

by Gordon Lindsay

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Part 1:

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount

The beatitudes are a basis for a Christian's consecration. They with the entire Sermon on the Mount represent the principles governing human conduct during the Millennium. They can be said in fact to be the constitution and laws of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus shows that His commandments did not abrogate the Law, but made possible its fulfillment. The Law itself was founded on the eternal principles of right and wrong. Nevertheless, the Law could only demand outward obedience. The New Testament in contrast dealt with the heart.

After giving the beatitudes to the people, Jesus shows the change that must come in the Mosaic Law. This was all in the plan of God. The Old Testament was the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament was the Old Testament revealed. The Mosaic Law was not a mistake, but it was the best possible Law for the time. It was God's will for a certain stage of human development. In time it had to be superseded as Matthew 5:20 infers. Divorce for example was permitted at that time because of the hardness of human hearts (Matt. 19:3-9). Whereas the law of revenge was permitted in Old Testament times, it was superseded with the coming of grace. Under the latter, retaliation was not permitted.

Many other instructions were given by Jesus in His discourse. He finally brought His sermon to a conclusion by stating that he who heard His words and did them was as the wise man who built his house upon the rock, while he that heard them and did them not was as the foolish man whose house was built on sand and when the flood came fell because though he heard Christ's words he did them not.

Chapter 1

The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached

The Sermon on the Mount began with Christ's disciples as hearers. He ascended a hill shaped like an amphitheater which rose above the city of Capernaum, and there He taught the Twelve. But the Lord could not be hidden long. Soon a great multitude began to gather unto Him. For a short space He occupied Himself with the physical needs of the people; and then when the multitude was properly seated He began His memorable discourse which has ever since been known as the Sermon on the Mount.

In analyzing this sermon one will at once be struck by the contrast between its delivery and that of the Law on Mt. Sinai. At the time of the Law's promulgation there was a background of thunder and lightning, and the voice of a trumpet waxed louder and louder. The sound came to the people from the unseen Presence shrouded by clouds, intermingled with pillars of smoke and a destroying fire. In contrast, the Sermon on the Mount came with sweetness and words of peace. The Voice on Sinai began with "thou shalt," and "thou shalt not." The Sermon on the Mount began with words of blessedness.

Nevertheless, the new commandments given on the Mount of the Beatitudes were not meant to abrogate the Law, but to make possible its fulfillment. The Law was founded upon the eternal distinction between right and wrong. Easier would it be for the heavens to fall than to destroy one tittle of the Law. Yet at the same time He showed that this obedience had nothing to do with a superstitious adherence to the letter. Christ Himself perfectly fulfilled the Law and then imparted a power to all those who believed in Him to keep it also, not in the ceremonial letter, but in the true spirit of it.

The people, including the disciples, supposed the kingdom would begin with an outward show of glory. They were expecting

a Messiah who would break the yoke of the Romans from off their necks. Their minds were filled with legendary prophecies of how the king would stand on the shore of the Sea of Joppa, and the waters would pour out pearls and treasures at his feet. He would feed them manna sweeter than that which fell in the wilderness, and clothe them with precious jewels and with scarlet. But in the Sermon on the Mount Christ revealed to them something altogether different—that happiness does not come through the amassing of earthly riches and that it was the meek and the poor who would inherit the earth.

In His sermon Jesus compared the old Law of threatening with the new law of mercy. One was a type and a shadow, and the other was reality and fulfillment. The Mosaic Law demanded outward obedience, but the new law penetrated into man's innermost thoughts. Jesus showed that the command against murder was extended to angry words and hatred. He said adultery not only consisted of the act, but also the look. The law of revenge was superseded by the law of self-abrogation. In addition the love of neighbor was to be extended to one's enemies.

Jesus particularly pointed out that the punctilious observance of the Law by the Pharisee was mere formalism and ostentation. Alms were to be given, but not with display. Prayers were to be made, but not in hypocritical ostentation. Fasting was well and good, but it was not to be done for show. All was to be done as unto God and not unto men. People were not to seek to lay up earthly treasure, but to lay up treasure in heaven where moth and rust will not corrupt and where thieves cannot break through and steal. Men were not to become overladen with the cares of life, but were to trust in the providence of God.

Jesus began His sermon with the beatitudes. The idea of the blessed life has been the theme of the philosopher from the beginning of time. What kind of life is worth living? Everyone knows that there are certain conditions required if one's life is to be worthwhile.

The founders of various religions have tried to answer this question. Gautama, the Buddha, became obsessed with the idea that self-consciousness in itself was the fundamental evil and source of misery, that true blessedness was found only in the gradual extinction of life, or personality itself. Although Buddha left behind many fine precepts, his religion was the very opposite of Christ's. While he considered personal existence a delusion and an evil, Christ declared, "I am come that they might have life,

and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Aristotle came to the conclusion that the blessed life was for the very few. It was not for the poor, the slaves, the diseased, the paupers, nor for those who died young. Christ on the other hand, declared that the blessed life was for all. Why? Because God reckons on the scale of eternity and not of time. As the apostle Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Christ dealt not with the few years on this earth in which there are many inequalities of opportunity and advantage, but rather with human destiny.

The Beatitudes

Let us begin to examine these beatitudes that Jesus gave to His disciples, which He tells us are the foundation of God's kingdom and human happiness.

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

The great motivating force of this material world is the almost universal desire for wealth. "The love of money is the root of all evil," said Paul. In circles where we would expect the greatest spirituality some have succumbed to the lure that "godliness is gain."

It was therefore far from popular for Christ to say, "Blessed be ye poor . . . woe unto you that are rich!" But we must not misunderstand this saying. Poverty in itself is not a virtue. It is possible for a person in dire squalor to have a selfish, grasping spirit. On the other hand, the detached soul can handle large sums of money for the Kingdom of God and not be touched by it. Christ in the incarnation emptied Himself. When He became a man He set an example by clinging to nothing external. He abandoned ease, the popularity of the masses, the favor of those in power, even the sympathy of His friends, and finally the consolation of God's presence at death. Each privilege He abandoned one by one.

Only those like Christ who can detach themselves from all material things can be ready for the true wealth. Only then can it be true as the apostle Paul said, "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

In the hour in which we live today, there seems to be a universal urge to accumulate wealth. Some have even preached

that riches are a sign of spirituality. Yet Jesus told a rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give to the poor.

There have been times in Church history when God has raised up men who dedicated themselves to a life of voluntary poverty. He has used such men to the great blessing of the Church and the world. God can also use wealth for His glory; but He must first have men who can detach themselves from wealth so that they possess it only for the glory of God—not letting the wealth possess them. Today the Church has the task of evangelizing the world, and this requires money. Money is a medium of exchange. It represents man's sweat and toil. We can by its means exchange our labor and substance and place it into the work of the Lord.

Thus we may be wise stewards of God's money. But woe to us if we lose our detachment and instead of possessing the money it should begin to possess us.

2. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

In His second beatitude the Lord again puts Himself in opposition to the favorite maxims of the world. The world says, "Get as much pleasure out of life as possible. Live it up. Put out of your mind everything that disquiets you. Don't be too solicitous about the troubles of others, and if you should get too disturbed take a tranquilizer. Eat, drink, and be merry, for today we live." In startling contrast to this philosophy Jesus says, "Blessed are they that mourn."

What does this mean? First of all, we must mourn over our sins—not only those sins before we accepted Christ, but the sins of a shallow, self-centered life. It is a sad fact that while many Christians have been set free from the bondage of the grosser sins that they at one time indulged in, *self* still plays a large part in their lives. Selfishness, envy, sharp business practices, foolishness, extravagant living, vanity, indulgence in questionable amusements and a worldly spirit in general indicate that the natural man is far from dead. It is not enough to say such things are all right because they are habitually done by others, or that they can be tolerated because others tolerate them. As the pure light of God searches our hearts we must seek an ever closer walk with Him. We must mourn over our shortcomings.

It is also our business to mourn for others. It is easy to take advantage of a prosperous position to screen ourselves off from

the sorrows and pains of others. But Jesus said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:24-25).

In proportion, as we enter into a sharing of the sufferings of mankind we receive the comfort of God. Our sorrow is not the sorrow of this world for "the sorrow of the world worketh death," but "godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of" (II Cor. 7:10).

Our mourning over the sorrows of the world must have a practical result. It would not help for us to become hermits and go off in the desert and live out our days. We must—as Jesus did after He spent His hours in prayer—arise therefrom and begin ministering to the world, comforting their sorrows and healing their wounds.

3. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

Again the Lord explains the character of those who are of the Kingdom of God by contrasting their spirit with that of the world. The world says, "Stand up for your rights. Don't let the other man put anything over on you. Watch out that you are not imposed upon." But Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek." He set an example as Peter tells us in his epistle, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. 2:23).

Meekness, however, does not mean that we shall never assert ourselves. It may be necessary for us to do things on occasion in order to keep evil from spoiling God's work. Jesus took a whip and drove the traffickers out of the temple. He rebuked men who were due censure.

Nevertheless, it is not our place to make a claim on the world. We need not labor for the poor treasures of this fading earth. Many there are who spend their days in a frenzy to accumulate a pitiful little of this world's goods, and then in a moment they leave it all. But the meek need not struggle for the world, for they "shall inherit the earth." As an heir they will receive it as a rightful possession. And when that time comes they need have no fear that any one can come and turn them out.

If we go about making claims that God has not authorized us to make, or if we seek this world's wealth as worldings do, then we shall be identified with those of the world. As the Pharisee, we shall have our reward. But if we are as the meek and take the lowest position, then there will come a time when the Master will say, "Friend, go up higher" (Luke 14:10). And when God gives us our portion who is he who will take it away?

4. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

Everyone knows what the appetite is and what it means to hunger and to thirst. It is a strong craving, and must be satisfied or we will finally perish. In human activity we see these emotions expressed in other ways than food or drink. Men hunger for position or for a place in society. Some crave to be amused; others hunger for fame and worldly honor. Still others long for wealth. Unfortunately for the seeker this appetite for earthly things is never satisfied. As Solomon says, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (Eccl. 1:8).

But Jesus spoke of another hunger, of a hungering and thirsting after righteousness. He promised that they who do so should be filled. Do we feel hopeless about achieving victory over our faults? Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall receive their desire even as the Lord saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied.

The only danger is that men will cease to hunger and thirst after righteousness. It is possible for men to get sidetracked and begin to hunger for other things such as worldly success or greatness in the eyes of the world. In so doing, they may lose the true hunger. But they that hunger for righteouness in this time shall truly be filled in the world to come.

5. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7).

Buddha could think of life only as essentially evil. He could imagine no redemption for it—only escape from it. Other philosophers have seen human misfortune and have indulged in pity. But pity that does nothing is regarded by the Scriptures as a form of hypocrisy (James 2:15-16).

True pity must lead to effective action in order to remove the human misery. For indeed this is a world filled with sorrow and heartache. And woe to the one who is fortunate enough to

enjoy the blessings of life and does nothing to help those who have nothing. In one of the parables of Jesus He described a man who was forgiven his debts by his master, but in turn he dealt unmercifully with his debtor. The remission was cancelled and the weight of his old debt fell back upon him. If we wish to know how the Lord will deal with us at the end of time we can find the answer in the Lord's prayer. He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." If we will not forgive our brother how can we expect God to forgive us? God will deal with us as we deal with our fellow men. And so it is recorded, "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful . . . and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward" (Psa. 18:24-26).

All of us want mercy. We can have it by showing mercy to others. And lest we forget—we who enjoy the blessings of salvation—how can we show mercy to the dying masses in a better way than doing our part in helping them to receive the Gospel of life?

6. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

There are two senses in which we may understand this beatitude. One is the narrow sense—the absence of sensual defilement. This is an important aspect of purity. As we view the world in its awful corruption, even the sinner can see that men and women abandoned to the depravity of this world could hardly have a place among the holy. They have no desire for it, for having lived only to satisfy the lusts of the flesh and having satiated themselves with sensuality they can only look forward to death to write the finis. They live as an animal, and they die as an animal. What a terrible awakening is in store for them.

The Kingdom of God must by contrast be a place of purity. Therefore, the salvation of Christ first of all purifies our hearts by faith. But to restrict purity to the mere absence of sensual defilement is not enough. A great many persons make little progress in attaining victory over impure temptations simply because they are not seeking holiness as a whole. Uncleanness they dislike because it weighs upon their conscience, but they do not have the same horror for pride, self-will, and lack of love. As David prayed in Psalm 51, a clean heart is coupled with a "right spirit." Our eye must be single toward God. We must not only hate evil in the flesh where its effect can be easily

measured, but we must hate it in the other realms of our being. There is no place for guile, for deceit, for a selfish soul or a contentious spirit. From these things God in His grace delivers us.

What kind of books do we read? With what kind of entertainment do we choose to amuse ourselves? Do we tolerate the loose joke, the story with a double meaning? Do we live in a low carnal plane? Is our nature so coarse and unpurified that we can listen to the suggestive, to the mean, to the sensual, and not be indignant? "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "As he thinketh . . . so is he." "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3). The pure in heart shall see God. What a reward! What an anticipation —that some day we shall see Him face to face!

7. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

Christ is the Prince of Peace. He is the one who speaks peace to our hearts. There are those who seem especially gifted in sowing dissension and misunderstanding. There are those who constantly seek to divide the Body of Christ. Perhaps they have a pet doctrine which has infatuated them. They are never satisfied until they have divided men, and under the guise of contending for the faith once delivered to the saints they go about making proselytes and wounding the Body of Christ afresh.

The true spirit of Christ seeks to unify the people of God. Paul speaks of the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ till we all come into the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. Jesus prayed that His church might be one:

> "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

Almost everyone subscribes to these sentiments, but this means nothing unless we help fulfill that prayer of Christ in a practical way. There is so much to divide men, to set them against one another. Thank God for the peacemakers who labor to draw men together into one spirit, into one accord, that the Church might have a unity of purpose.

Yet we cannot pass this subject without noting that there is such a thing as a false peace, a false unity based on compromise with the world. Christ came to break up this peace. "I came

not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). Peace can never be purchased by sacrificing truth or by compromising with the world.

But we who are Christians, members of His Body, can we not labor for peace? Shall we not do all we can to reconcile members of the Body? Shall we not pray that the raw competitive spirit will be overcome, that the jealousies between denominations, the rivalries among clergy and church-workers will all vanish as we together kneel at the foot of the cross? If we do so, then our benediction will be of the highest and we may be truly called the sons of God.

8. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

It might be supposed by some that those who had sought and attained the blessedness that Christ spoke of in the beatitudes would find all men speaking well of them. This, however, is far from the truth. Jesus perfectly practiced what He preached; yet He stirred up the enmity of the religious rulers wherever He went. The world loves its own and is not inclined to go out of its way in blessing those who seek to live the principles that Christ set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. When Jesus was merciful to the sinner woman the Pharisees resented it. When He told the people to labour not for the meat that perisheth, but rather to hunger for that which endured unto everlasting life, they did not understand and left Him (John 6:27, 66). When He spoke about the blessings of the poor in spirit He received little applause, for they thought of the Kingdom of God only in its coming splendor. Even the apostles entertained that idea, and when Judas Iscariot discovered the actual truth he was moved to betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver.

Holiness is not welcomed by the world. Religion the world will accept, but he who preaches of life is mocked by his generation. He is told that moral standards have changed. Those who still contend for such things are subject to contempt. They are called puritanical, old fogies, completely out of step with the times!

As soon as a man sets himself to obey the commandments of

Jesus he will be tempted by the question of whether he is aiming too high to be practical. If he is to help men, should he not be like them? No, if one is to help man, he must be unlike him. Man should not be offered something to make him a little more respectable, but rather to make him like Jesus. Others may mock for a while, but when the day of trouble comes they will go to the one who has reality, not to a worldly moralist.

Christ showed that His Gospel was to arrest attention by its powerful contrast with the world. This was the meaning of the metaphors that follow the beatitudes.

> "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matt. 5:13).

Salt which has lost its savor is worthless. The disciples could understand this. Much of their fishing product had been for export. It had to be salted to escape putrefaction. Jesus said that Christians are the salt of the earth. How little the world realizes what it owes the believer whom it despises. Were it not for the Christians the world would have strangled in its decay. Some 1650 years after Adam the antediluvian world had to be destroyed. About 450 years after that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. After another 450 years the land of Canaan regurgitated its inhabitants because of the extreme wickedness of the people. But now for nearly 2,000 years time has gone on, and God has permitted the nations to go their way. Poor as the showing of Christianity has been, it has been the salt which has preserved the world from the judgment it richly deserves. However, once the Church—the salt of the earth—is taken out, we may expect the judgments of God to fall in apocalyptic intensity.

What is so useless as a hollow profession of religion? It is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men. Christ said to the Laodicean church, "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16).

> "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

The teaching of Christ contrasts with everything taught before or since. We have often heard that there are more good Mohammedans in Mohammedan countries than there are good Christians in Christian countries. There is a reason for this. Mohammed set before his people a religion calculated to commend itself to those who heard him. It required no fundamental change in human character. No real transformation was required. It was enough if they observed the religious ceremonies and fought the enemies of Islam. That done, it was all that was required.

But Christ said that except a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. It is a religion that required self-denial. Therefore, it found fewer genuine adherents than Mohammedanism. But through those who have been truly born again there has been effected the greatest spiritual revolution the world has ever known.

The Medieval Church lost its power when it began to baptize men in masses without a change of heart. And today as the lukewarm church seeks to lower its standards so that it can accommodate the world in general, it loses its power. To sacrifice a standard for numbers is a grave error. May God grant that the Church retain the savour of its salt. Then it will be the light of the world—the only true light—as the nations plunge into the darkness of the Great Tribulation.

Chapter 2

The Beatitudes: The Change of the Mosaic Law

Did God inspire Moses to write the Law contained in the first five books of the Old Testament? And did the same God send Jesus into the world to give us the Law of Grace? If so, there must be a compatible relation between the two. Nevertheless, there must also be a fundamental difference. Jesus declared that although the old Mosaic Law said thus and thus, He was making changes. What then is the relation of the Mosaic Law to the Law of Christ?

It is in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus explained the relation of the Mosaic Law to the Law of Grace. First, there is continuity between the two (Matt. 5:17-19). Second, the new Law of Grace does not destroy the Mosaic Law, but supersedes and fulfills it. This continuity is stated in this way:

> "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19).

The Law was not a mistake. It was the best Law that was possible for the time and the circumstance. It was given to fulfill a purpose, and before it could fail fulfillment heaven and earth should pass away. We shall see as we examine the matter in detail, that every element of the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in the New Testament. The Old is the New concealed; the New is the Old revealed.

Is it the moral law? As we compare the Ten Commandments with the Sermon on the Mount we see the former fulfilled in the latter. Or is it the ritual law? As we study the enactments

and statutes of Leviticus we see them fulfilled in Hebrews. One is a type and shadow of the other. The Mosaic Law was a training school to prepare men for the Law of Grace. The elements of the Old Testament are imperfect. They represent God's will at a certain stage of human development. Its statutes were not to be despised or dishonored. Often when people find something new their first impulse is to criticize what they believed before. Therefore, the Lord warned that any who would exhibit a spirit of destructiveness toward the Law would be given the lowest place in the kingdom.

Jesus then went on to show that the Mosaic Law was imperfect, that it had to be superseded:

> "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

The mere performance of the outward rituals of the Law was not sufficient. The Pharisees and scribes had by-passed all the deeper truths of the Law and the prophets and had narrowed their religious obligations to an external observance of the rituals. These had no power to change the carnal nature and thus resulted self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Christ's ministry and teaching had its roots in the Old Testament and was compatible with it; yet it was more than that. It made possible the objectives of the Old Testament. In other words, the Mosaic Law had gone as far as it could and had exhausted its possibilities. What Christ was about to give men was something new, as indeed it had to be. The Mosaic Law, although good in itself, failed to grant the doer the power to fulfill it. Something more was needed and Christ was to be the fount from which that power would spring. The Law of Moses dealt only with the actual act. The Law of Christ dealt with the motivation in a man's heart which was behind the act. Of this we shall now take notice.

> "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:21-22).

Here the Lord raised the whole standard regarding guilt. He

took no account of the actual act of murder, which had to be punished. He who has committed the crime of homicide has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven. But Christ deals with what goes on in the heart, from which the act of violence eventually springs.

Under Christ's Law the wicked anger and malice entertained in the heart was equivalent to actual homicide. In other words, the sins of the heart are brought to the same level as the act itself, because these sins, if permitted in the soul, can destroy it.

The Lord then went on to say that if one found that there existed an uncharitable relation between himself and one of his brethren, he was to leave his gift at the altar and go and be reconciled with his brother.

Offenses against a brother have an evil effect on the conscience and should be dealt with without delay. Though Christ was speaking to the Jews, His words apply to all in the New Kingdom. We too go to the altar to offer up our body as spiritual sacrifice as we worship God in Spirit and in truth (Romans 12:1-2). We are to offer up the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Heb. 13:10-15). Therefore, it is all-important that we maintain the right relation with our brother.

The Law Against Adultery

> "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

We have just seen that Christ equated hatred in the heart to the act of murder and its awful consequences. In the matter of adultery the Lord identified the same guilt attached to the overt act to the desire in the heart, when it reaches the place of deliberate intention to sin.

In this case the man looked on a woman to excite his lust and was restrained only by lack of opportunity or fear of consequence. To will to sin or to stimulate sin bears the same guilt in the sight of God as the actual commission of it.

For this reason Christ urged men to take the necessary steps of self-discipline which would enable them to be preserved from sin:

> "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members

should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30).

In other words, if a disordered member of our body is destroying the roots of our life it would be better that this member perish. Whatever exposes us to temptation that is too strong for us must be abandoned. While this metaphor is hardly to be applied literally, it finds abundant application. Are certain worldly pleasures proper for the consecrated Christian? Is this or that justifiable? We could go down a long list. The question is, what do these things do to us? Perhaps some of these things appear innocent enough. Jesus said that it was better to enter into life maimed than to possess all the world has to offer and be destined to a moral death. In other words, even in the matter of things men think legitimate, if they get out of control they should be gotten rid of. Better any sacrifice than the lower part of our nature should triumph over the higher.

The Law of Divorce

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matt. 5:31-32).

Under the old Jewish Law divorce was permitted:

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife" (Deut. 24:1-2).

Under this provision of the Mosaic Law the Jews felt quite free to divorce and remarry. In Matthew 19:3-9 Jesus explained why Moses permitted the children of Israel to put away their wives. *It was because of the hardness of their hearts.* By reason of their low state of spirituality a situation could develop that made living together as man and wife impossible. Under these circumstances there was nothing to do but make allowances, even though divorce and remarriage were utterly against the original

purpose of God. "From the beginning it was not so." But Jesus came to set the matter aright by abolishing divorce.

Beyond all question, therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ should stand against divorce and remarriage—with one exception that Jesus noted—fornication. In a real sense, fornication actually is not an exception. The death of one partner in a marriage allowed the other party the privilege of remarrying. Fornication was punishable by death; and although the person who committed the sin might evade the penalty, in the sight of God he was accounted guilty and worthy of death. For this reason only, divorce becomes justifiable. The exception neither sanctions nor prohibits the remarriage of an innocent party who has put away his partner because of adultery. With this exception it would appear that the Christian Church cannot give sanction to divorce and remarriage.

The Law of Taking An Oath

> "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matt. 5:33-37).

The Third Commandment, taken with other passages in the Old Testament enjoined a man to swear only by Jehovah, and upon so swearing to be diligent in the performance of his oath (see Gen. 28:20; Deut. 6:13; Amos 8:14). Christ amended, or deepened the injunction.

It is important to understand the nature of an oath. In making an oath, a person solemnly asserts in God's presence and as surely as he hopes for God's blessing to be upon his life that what he says is the truth. But is God present only on occasion? As Paul states, "For in him we live and move, and have our being." Jesus would show us that God is everywhere—in the heavens, on earth, and in Jerusalem. If this be true then why should men only on set occasions acknowledge God's presence and tell the truth? The Jew would forswear himself, but would think nothing of telling what was not true on other occasions. Christ would lift to a new level all conversation which had been previously held

only on declarations of oath. The apostle James repeats this injunction of the Lord:

> "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (James 5:12).

We are living in a day when men count keeping their word as a small matter. It is a fundamental lack of integrity that has resulted in such a deterioration of the spiritual level of the Church.

The question may be asked whether all oaths are prohibited to a Christian, such as those administered in a court. It will be noted that the Lord Himself consented to be put under oath by the high priest, and to that adjuration He gave answer (Matt. 26:63-64). The apostle Paul on several occasions takes God as witness. With these precedents it would hardly seem possible to say that a Christian cannot take an oath in a court of justice. The reason that oaths are taken in court is because of the habitual neglect of truth in ordinary conversation. A real Christian, of course, is always truthful. A man is living far below the Christian standard if he tells the truth only because he thinks he is bound by his oath.

Chapter 3

The Beatitudes: The Treatment of Enemies

The Law of Revenge

> "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. 5:38-42).

The Lord having dealt with three of the commandments, turned to certain other aspects of the Law, and as He did with the others so He deepens and intensifies and brings them up to the moral standard of the New Testament.

Under the Mosaic Law revenge was permitted up to a certain point. It could only go to exact reciprocity. The Law in Exodus 21:24-25 laid down the rule: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

Here we see that the Mosaic Law was a limitation of human instinct. The spirit of revenge seeks to do as much harm to the enemy as is possible. The savage will not only kill the man who has done him wrong but also his wife and family. The Old Covenant checked such barbarism and placed it under restraint. The Law of Moses stood by as a referee, or a policeman. It said, "Was an eye put out? All right, then an eye must be given in return, but no more." The Mosaic Law worked by limitation. The savage tendencies of men were curbed by the Law until they were brought under discipline by the Law of Christ.

But then Christ came and said that a wrong received should be only an occasion to show superiority to the outrage. Christ demanded more than moderation. He required self-effacement.

It is important to understand these principles of Christ's Law concerning revenge. There is a tendency within us that makes us feel that when a man has done wrong he should suffer wrong in return. But in our own case, self-interest enters in and is so mixed with selfishness that the Lord imposed an absolute ban on personal revenge. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). In other words, He takes away the right to administer justice in our case which was permitted to the avenger of blood under the Mosaic Law. Under the Law of Grace, however, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

The Lord did not except Himself from His own Law. How often did He have to bear the injustices of men when He had it within His power to correct them. Take for example the false witnesses who twisted His words. He never had said, as is recorded in Mark 14:58, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." He had said something similar to that, but the meaning was radically different. It was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Jesus was conscientious, and when He heard this false misrepresentation, this wicked distortion of His words before the people—many of whom had confidence in Him—it was a particularly sore trial. Yet "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. 2:23).

We have another duty which can only be performed when personal feelings are completely suppressed. This other duty may seem incompatible with the first, although of course it is not. If a brother sins against us, Jesus did not say we were to take no notice of it; there were certain steps to take.

> "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:15-17).

So it was that in the trial when He was struck Jesus protested the action (John 18:22-23). Likewise, when Paul was standing

at the judgment seat and was not being treated fairly, he made a claim for justice:

> "Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof those accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar" (Acts 25:10-11).

It is obviously our duty to stand up for social justice, but we may do this only when our personal feelings are subordinated to God's will and all instinct of revenge is subdued.

It is imperative that we carefully examine our feelings which involve actions with our brother. In one instance we are told that "If any man will . . . take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." But there is another principle which also must be carried out: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault," and follow the matter up to its extreme consequences.

We see that different occasions call for varied actions. Too often differences arise in which there is a conflict of interests. Though the other party may be definitely at fault, the circumstances are such that they are not easy to prove. Although the person's claim is most unreasonable the facts cannot be brought out without an elaborate proof such as that required by a case in court. There is room for evasions, maneuverings, false witnessing, and every evil thing. No good will come out of pursuing the matter. If the man wants the coat and cloak both, it is best to let him have it.

Retaliation in the matter of slander is another temptation. But incriminations and recriminations can lead to bitterness and can destroy far more than they can correct. It is better to let the matter go. If we seek to defend ourselves under these circumstances God will let us go ahead. If we put our case in the hands of God, He will in time vindicate us. We are to efface ourselves; we are to turn the other cheek.

There is also the case of lawsuits. Paul strictly forbids believers to go to law one against another. It is better to settle out of court. It is better to suffer loss than to drag the cause of Christianity into the courts. Yet there may be instances where the cause of society would suffer because of an evildoer. Certainly in the matter of one who seeks to defraud God's people it may well be the duty of those concerned to use the courts of the land to protect the interests of the innocent.

The Law of Giving to Enemies

"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again" (Luke 6:30).

As we have seen, it would be the duty in certain cases to take action against a thief. Yet in some cases it may be best to overlook the loss. Again with first offenders, if at all possible we should give them an opportunity for a fresh chance. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Sometimes the law must take its course with an offender; yet kindness to him while he suffers his sentence may bear a rich reward.

Christians sometimes have the problem of a brother who has wormed himself into a position of confidence to take advantage of his opportunity to appropriate what is not his. What should they do? In some cases there is nothing to do but to let the one who betrayed his trust keep his ill-gotten gains. That is what Jesus did with Judas Iscariot (John 12:6). Yet one should at least attempt to secure an amicable settlement. Failing that, it may be wise to say nothing further. The party wronged would do well not to give the man an opportunity to repeat the offense.

"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. 5:42).

What are we to say to the beggar who asks for help? We know that there are worthy cases in which help is needed. Misfortunes happen to people, and it is our duty to assist them and if possible help them to resume a normal course of life. Yet it would be poor wisdom to give to everyone who solicits help. This is a matter in which one needs to seek divine guidance. If we give to the wrong cause then we shall not have the means to give where it really is needed.

The Law of Prosperity

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

God has given a special law of prosperity for those who are generous in their giving. "Give, and it shall be given unto you." The gift must, however, be given in faith. And above all, the motive must be right. If one's motive is merely to gain riches to spend on his lusts, then the consequences can be disastrous.

We give so that we can receive and therefore are able to give again and again.

God's promise to the giver is not only the promise of a reward in the world to come. It is that indeed, but the promise speaks also of temporal blessings, "shall men give into your bosom." Not every time however does God immediately return the blessing. There may be severe testings. God's children should be able to stand the tests of both adversity and prosperity. Indeed, with many it is harder for them to stand prosperity than adversity (II Chron. 26:15-16). But if we are faithful God will bless us so that we in turn may be a blessing to others.

We should not resent giving to people who have no claim on us. If we give only to our friends what thanks have we? "Do not publicans even the same?" Yet our intelligence should be brought to bear on our giving. Men have given indiscriminately to charity and neglected to give to God's work. Again some have hoarded their money, and when they passed on ungodly relatives inheriting their hard-earned money squandered it on that which had no relation to the Kingdom of God. All the labor of years went into the hands of wastrels who never gave a thought of gratitude to the source of the gift. The persons who could have so easily exchanged their earthly wealth for wealth in heaven find that when they enter there they have cheated themselves. But alas, there is not a thing they can do about it then.

The Treatment of Enemies

> "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:43-48).

While the exact words, "Thou shalt . . . hate thine enemy," do not appear in the Law, the words in a sense represent the spirit of those who were the children of the Law. In the Psalms we find imprecations against the enemies of Israel, as being the enemies

of the Lord. The Psalms of course fall short of the Christian standard, both of hope for the conversion of enemies or of love toward them. This is not surprising, for the Old Testament represented law rather than mercy. The wickedness of the enemies of Israel called for the retribution of divine justice, and on occasion Israel as a nation was used as an instrument to inflict that punishment.

Nevertheless, there was mercy and love even in the Old Testament and it was the purpose of Christ to bring out and develop those seeds of love. Under the standard level of Christianity we are to love our enemies. Until Christ came human nature was too carnal to accept this standard of conduct. Only the Son of God had the power to introduce and make practical in the lives of men and women such a revolutionary concept. Even as God for Christ's sake forgave us while in effect we were the enemies of God, so we in turn are called upon to love those who are our enemies. It is in loving those who hate us and spitefully use us that Christianity rises above the level of historical, contemporary philosophies and stands unique among all the religions on earth.

Publicans and sinners are kind to their friends. Human convenience dictates such a course. But what Christ asks is a divine motive to account for Christian kindness. For our enemies who are plotting our harm and who would even use our kindness to them to hurt us further, only a supernatural power, a religion that does not have its source on earth but in heaven, would cause us to do good to them under these circumstances. But Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

Is such a goal unattainable? Not if we have Christ's Spirit working within us. We have an eternity before us, and if we are moving in the right direction we shall surely reach the goal.

Chapter 4

The Beatitudes: The Motive and Spirit of a Disciple of Christ

The principles of Christ's Sermon on the Mount cannot be reduced to exact words as a lawyer's document. They have to be interpreted and carried out in the spirit of love. Not only the act, but the motive behind the act is deeply involved. One cannot take the words, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," or, "If any man . . . take away thy coat let him have thy cloke also" and make an inflexible rule for external conduct without upsetting the whole basis of society. Even Jesus did not turn the other cheek when He was struck by one of the officers of the High Priest at His trial (John 18:22-23).

But these principles of conduct are to become the very part of one's character and are then translated into action according to the dictates of wisdom as required by the time and the occasion.

Throughout Chapter 6 of Matthew, the one great subject and theme is that the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven looks only to God as the basis for his action. He looks only for the praise of God and not for the praise of men. What he does is done only unto God and not unto man.

Christ nowhere condemns the seeking of a reward—only the seeking of it in the wrong place. If good deeds are done for the sake of the praise of men there is no reward in heaven.

It is one of the fundamental instincts of a human being to have a motive behind each action. That is true of both good men and evil men. The first thing the law seeks to establish when a crime is committed is what the motive is. Sacrifice without a cause or a motive is not Scriptural. As has been truly said by Charles Gore in his book *Sermon on the Mount,* "We cannot separate love for God from a desire to find our happiness in God. This is an inseparable part of our personality. We must crave for ultimate satisfaction, recognition, and approval. The point is we should seek it in the right place, that is from God."

Jesus applies the principle of seeking Christ's approval to three branches of human conduct: (1) Duty to God (2) Duty to one's neighbor (3) Duty to one's self. The first is expressed in prayer and worship of God. The second finds expression in our acts of mercy to men. And the last in self-mastery and the subduing of the flesh—that is in fasting. In each case we are to look for the approval of God.

Almsgiving

> "Take heed that ye do not do your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. 6:1-3).

In the above verses Jesus used a metaphor. We do not suppose that the Pharisees actually sounded a trumpet on the street; and the words, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," is clearly a figurative way of speaking. The Lord simply forbade ostentation in giving.

Do we do the good deed only when people are looking? What is our motive? And this is something for us to think about when we encourage people to give—do we encourage them to give for good, or for carnal motives? If we use bad motives in order to get people to give their money, it is not for the glory of God nor for the good of His work.

> "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:16-18).

When the Lord commands us to pray in secret, give in secret, and fast in secret, He is referring to the motive. We must interpret these commands in the light of what He teaches elsewhere. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 16:2 that we are to have church collections. In Matthew 18:19-20 the Lord teaches that the members of the Church are to pray together. In Acts 13:1-2 we find the

leaders of the church at Antioch fasting and praying as a group. It would be ridiculous to suppose that Christ were speaking against the social worship performed by the Church as a body. There is a community sense of responsibility for God's people to worship together as members of one body. It would be foolish to interpret the words of our Lord as inveighing against common fasts, or common prayer, or common giving.

Yet fasting to a great extent is a matter between the person and God. An important purpose in fasting is to bring the body under control of the Spirit. Because the body has the tendency to get the upper hand, it is necessary for us from time to time to subordinate it to the Spirit by means of fasting.

Unworldliness

The keynote of the sixth chapter of Matthew is that the motive of our acts is to obtain the approval of God. The Christian has only one Master, and that is God. This gives us a complete freedom from the anxieties of life. Since our motives are only Godward, we seek not to lay up goods on this earth which only rust and corrupt:

> "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

Most of us know that this world has many dishonest persons in it. He that seeks to accumulate treasures of this earth should take steps to protect them from theft. There never has been a time when society has been able to protect itself fully from loss in this respect. Thieves still succeed in breaking through and stealing what does not belong to them.

Besides this, moth and rust and other agents of decay ceaselessly work to despoil and to ruin the treasures of men. Where is the wealth of the world which existed in Jesus' day, over which men fought and gave their lives? Long ago it perished and has lain amid the dust and rubble of departed centuries. What is left are only the relics—the broken stones reflecting an age that has vanished. Even the Seven Wonders of the World (with the exception of the Great Pyramid) are fallen into ruins. Why then should men trade their lives for such things as these?

Rather, Jesus said to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. What does it mean to lay up treasures in heaven? Is it not our acts of love for Christ's cause, our winning of the lost to the Saviour, our prayers for the coming of the kingdom, our giving to the cause of missions? These are the ways to lay up treasures in heaven. All this effort that may seem at times to be lost is really laid up in the treasure house of heaven.

Let us not fool ourselves. There is no purpose in saying that we love God if our actions belie our words. Jesus gave us a true test as to whether we love God. He said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If one's treasure lies in the world and its works, its popularity, its glory, its glamour, then that is where the heart is also.

No Man Can Serve Two Masters

> "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:21-24).

God must be put first or not at all. In every man's life one motivating force becomes dominant. Either he seeks to do God's will or to do what he thinks will best serve his own interests in this world. Either God rules a man's life, or else mammon rules it.

Some fear that if they put God first in everything their life will become narrowed and dwarfed. But the very reverse is true. Jesus said, "If . . . thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." A life fully consecrated to God has an amazing potential.

Nevertheless, the Lord gives a warning. Some whose lives are most shallow appear smugly complacent and assume an air of assurance that all is indeed well with them. Some are walking according to a conscience which Paul says has been "seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:2). A bad conscience can lead a person far astray. It is strange but true that men can stray so far from the right that they can sincerely believe in the wrong. In the days of the judges, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." It is said that of the majority of criminals brought

into court, at the time they committed the crime they were not acting against their consciences.

Freedom from Worldly Anxiety

The result of singleness of mind is freedom from anxiety. The keynote to liberation from worry is this: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . and all these things shall be added unto you." If day by day we do His will and cast all our care on Him, then we can have a glorious freedom from anxiety—freedom from fear of want, freedom from fear that we shall not be clothed or fed (Read Matt. 6:25-34).

These are days when men are seeking material security. Fear of poverty causes them to demand that the government provide for them. And so instead of being dependent on God, men more and more become dependent on the government. Communism makes a man a cog in a machine. One does what the government tells him to do, and the government does his thinking and provides for him even as the jailer provides for the inmates. The welfare state leads in the same direction. These things frustrate the divine plan which is that men learn to lean on God and secure His guidance day by day and depend upon Him to care for them. So the Lord would have men to cast all their care upon Him, for He careth for them.

Yet our trust in God is not a passive trust without activity. The birds of the air which Christ spoke about are constantly making provision. Everything they do is done with the view of the future. The winged creature builds her nest, lays her eggs, and nestles above them with the thought of the young birdlets which will presently hatch from the shells. And when this happens the parents instinctively go in search of food to satisfy the fledglings' appetites. But everything is done in tranquility in an unconscious fulfillment of the purpose of God.

So it is in the matter of health. How many people have a chronic neurotic condition because they live in a state of continuous morbid anxiety. They are like Martha, troubled about many things; but in their anxiety they miss the most important thing—a complete committal of their lives to God.

The chapter closes with the words, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." There is no purpose in crossing bridges before we come to them.

Chapter 5

The Beatitudes: Final Instructions

In the last part of the Sermon on the Mount final instructions are given to him who would be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

> "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2).

These words bring us back to Chapter 5 in which Jesus takes note that the Heavenly Father "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Since God is long-suffering with the unjust and with the sinner, the same spirit should mark His disciples.

In other words, His followers are not to be as the Pharisees who considered their greatest achievement in religion was their self-assumed right to condemn others. Their attitude in this is shown in their statement concerning the people. "This people who knoweth not the law are cursed" (John 7:49). The Pharisee had gone to school and graduated. He considered himself in a position to set everyone else in his place. As someone has said, "The Pharisee was both critical and hypocritical—critical with regard to others; with regard to himself, hypocritical."

Christ, on the other hand, taught the opposite—that one should be severe on himself, but make the best of others; that a man should cast the beam out of his own eye before he attempted to remove the mote out of his brother's eye. It is well said that when considering the fault of another person and one is finally bound to condemn it, the weight attached to one's verdict likely depends upon whether or not he is a critical person.

We must not misunderstand the Lord's command. There are some things we are not to tolerate. Indeed there are those who tolerate evil in the Church to its own destruction. There are some

who have no standards of right or wrong at all. Certainly the Lord could denounce evil in the severest terms when it was necessary.

For example, what should we do if our brother trespasses against us? Are we to do nothing? Jesus did not say that. When it is a matter where no important principle is involved then we should withhold judgment. But where a matter of right or wrong is involved it is not only our duty to pass judgment, but even to bind and loose (Matt. 18:15-18). We are, therefore, not to be censorious in spirit—always trying to see the worst in people, although when occasion so requires we must maintain the right.

Paul goes so far as to tell us that we are not to judge those who are without, but those that are within the Body of Christ (I Cor. 5:12). He severely condemned the assembly at Corinth for allowing evil to be tolerated within the congregation.

John the apostle said that if one comes with a doctrine which denied any of the basic principles of Christianity, they were not to tolerate him nor wish him Godspeed (II John 1:10, 11).

It has been pointed out that the person with a good conscience has little difficulty in distinguishing between the duty of judgment and carnal criticism. On the other hand, those with the lowest standards of right and wrong are usually the most critical of others.

As we deal with others, so God will deal with us. On the basis which we judge others, on the same basis will we be judged (Luke 6:37-38).

> "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matt. 7:6).

Here is a command that the young convert may fail to understand. He is taught and truly so that he must be a witness to Christ. As God blesses him and perhaps takes him into intimate spiritual experiences, he may feel impelled to relate them to others. Some indeed respond and share the joy of the young Christian. However, not anticipating the spirit with which what he says will be received, he may cast his pearls before unworthy persons. The reception he will receive may be an unexpected and unhappy one. It may be as that given by the sow in the hog sty that would trample precious jewels underfoot.

Christ gave to men the highest they could receive. He did not give them everything at once. To the disciples who listened to

Him on His last night just before He was arrested and taken to trial, Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). Christ gives to men what they are capable of receiving. He did not teach all men the highest truths. He used judgment and waited until there were those who had ears to hear.

God has called us to be witnesses. He has given us great truths and we should be eager to communicate them to all who will receive them. But we are to be discriminating. We are not to give out the most sacred truths of the Gospel to the profane or to the mockers. We are to wait until men show a desire before we offer them.

A Lesson on Prayer

> "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matt. 7:7-8).

Again Christ gave another lesson on prayer in which He showed that God gives to all who ask. He touched on the infinite potentiality of the prayer of faith. In Mark 11:24 He said, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." It is sometimes said that the Sermon on the Mount contains no doctrine, but surely two cardinal doctrines of the Church are implied. The Deity of Christ is seen in the authoritative way He spoke to the people (Matt. 7:29). Second, for Matthew 7:11 to be intelligible we must assume human nature to be sinful. Jesus is talking about good parents who would do their best for their children; yet He says, "If ye then, being evil." Nothing could more forcibly imply that men have a corrupt and fallen nature. Any man who attempts to carry out the commandments of Jesus soon learns that his nature needs a divine rebirth if he is to be successful in attaining his purpose.

The Golden Rule

> "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2).

Jesus sums up in one sentence the whole meaning of the Law. We are to do to others as we would have others to do to us.

Notice that Christ is positive in His statements. He does not say, "Do not do unto others what ye would not have them do unto yourselves." Christ was not interested in men's merely abstaining from wrong doing, but that they should occupy themselves in right doing.

This royal commandment of Jesus should not be interpreted in the literal letter. Nothing is more annoying than to have people behave as if everyone must agree with what they like and dislike. What is meant of course is that we should be considerate of others in the same way that we would desire them to be considerate of us. In other words, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

How different is Christ's law of love from that of Samson's rule of life, who after he had tied the tails of the foxes to burning brands and sent them into the standing corn of the Philistines defended his act to his brethren saying, "As they did unto me, so have I done unto them" (Judges 15:11).

Jesus said concerning the Golden Rule, that "this is the law and the prophets." The Old Testament represents a process of growth. Toward this it tended, but it reached its goal only when Christ came.

The Final Warnings

1. *The two ways*:

> "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

This statement is not given merely as an answer to our curiosity as to the ultimate destinies of men. It does bring out the truth that many may choose the broad way, while few take the hard way. He who would follow Christ must be prepared to stand alone and not float downstream with the crowd. The way of Christ is the way of struggle, of persecution, of a cross to bear. Those who seek to follow Christ should pause and count the cost. They who would have eternal life must be willing to pay the price.

2. *Warning against false teachers*:

> "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know

them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:15-20).

Men are to beware of hypocrites, of false teachers. There are those who speak smooth things and give fine sounding speeches. Their arguments are plausible; their words are glib. Alas, many people cannot discriminate between the anointing of God and the anointing of the devil. By smooth arguments these false prophets deceive many as they lure unwary souls to destruction. Yet Jesus gives a simple test, so that no one need be deceived. He says, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

If the lives of men are marred by evil, by pride, by haughty ambition, by sectarianism, by a malicious spirit, by a lust for money, by an inordinate urge for popularity, by a lowering of moral standards, then regardless of the gifts and talents they may possess, all is of no avail. Jesus emphasizes this in a remarkable statement which follows.

3. *Warning against those possessing gifts who fail to walk uprightly.*

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:21-23).

To some this is one of the most puzzling statements of the Scriptures. Is it possible that a man may truly prophesy yet be a false prophet—to be cast away at the great judgment? What is the answer?

What of Balaam? Did he not prophesy the true words of God? Did not he give a beautiful prophecy of Christ as the Star rising out of Jacob? (Num. 24:17). But he died the death of the soothsayer and loved the wages of unrighteousness (II Pet. 2:15). Caiaphas, the high priest, gave a true prophecy; but his hands were stained with the blood of the Son of God (John 11:49-52).

What about the man who heals the sick in Jesus' name? Can he be lost? One of those who heard Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount healed the sick; Christ commissioned him to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (Matt. 10:8). Judas was his name, and he "obtained part in this ministry" (Acts 1:17). As to what happened to him, all of us know. Having betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver he went out into the night and hanged himself.

Miracles done in the name of Jesus indicate, but do not always prove that a man is walking with God (Mark 9:38-39). He may do many things, but if the fruits of righteousness do not follow his ministry, in the end they avail him nothing. Paul says, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity (divine love), I am nothing" (I Cor. 13:2).

As Jesus closed His sermon He made a solemn statement. He declared that only those who obey His words can expect to stand when the floods of judgment strike; that the only foundation that will stand the storm is that built on His words. He who does them will come through the flood unscathed, for his house is built upon the rock. But he that hears the words of Jesus and does them not is as he that built upon the sand. When the storm came and the floods beat upon the house, it fell, and the fall thereof was great:

> "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:24-27).

Part 2:

Parables Concerning Prayer

The Prodigal Son and Prayer Parables

These six chapters are an integral part of the *Life of Christ* series. One of the evidences of Christ's uniqueness is found in the truths of these remarkable parables, sublime in the simplicity of their portrayal of great truths, taken as they are from real life. Yet they are awe-inspiring in the depth and scope of their unfolding of the principles of the kingdom of heaven.

When the parables were first spoken by Jesus the disciples had great difficulty in understanding them. However, Christ explained the parables to them and His explanation gives us insight into the meaning of the others. Nevertheless, as we shall see and as Christ's words in Matthew 13:11-14 clearly indicate, the parables were not intended to be understood by all. They were meant both to instruct and to puzzle. If one has a true spiritual hunger he will search out and discover their truths. Those who are merely curious, they only mystify. As Jesus said, "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:13).

The writer has, in a prayerful research of the subject sought always to stay in the mainstream of Christian thought. We have avoided those novel theories which inevitably appear from time to time. One of the features of true interpretation of Bible doctrine is that it possesses a quality of soundness. As Paul said to Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13).

Chapter 6

The Lost Sheep

> "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:1-6).

Jesus had been visiting and eating with publicans and sinners. The Pharisees took note of this with sharp disapproval and said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." In answering them Jesus spoke three parables, the first of which was that of the Lost Sheep.

He began His parable by asking a question, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" Jesus did not wish to give the impression that souls were valuable only because there was a multitude of them, but that one soul alone was of such worth as to attract the full attention of the Great Shepherd.

The shepherd numbered his sheep carefully. He found only ninety-nine. He numbered them again but still one was lacking. There was no mistake; a sheep was lost. Other animals can find their way home by themselves, but not a sheep. Separated from the flock, it wanders, not knowing where it goes. Bleating vainly for help, startled by anything that moves, it will hurry on to the point of exhaustion. It will not rest in separation from the flock, but must move ever on as long as its strength lasts, a striking example of the unrest of the human soul.

The shepherd realized that a sheep will never return by itself. He had to leave all and put the finding of the lost sheep above all. He had to leave the ninety and nine, not in the fold, but in the wilderness. There was no time to take the flock to safety. Every moment was precious. The shepherd had to get on the track and pursue the sheep until he found it. If he saw the sheep scurrying away he would have to increase his speed until he overtook it. If it were fallen in a pit he would lift it out. If it were bruised and bleeding, he would take it up and put it on his shoulders and would bring it home rejoicing.

The meaning of the parable is clear and beautiful. The wandering of a sheep is a picture of human stupidity. No animal is more stupid and ignorant and has less sense of direction than a sheep. So is the sinner. Sinners are unreasoning, ignorant, and willful in their wandering from God. They act from a blind illogical impulse. It is the blindness of the sinner that awakens the compassion of the Saviour. The lost one thinks he is better free of God's control and can do as he pleases; and so he wanders on farther and farther from God. In its uncertainty the sheep hastens its pace, rushing onward to destruction. So does the sinner. As the prophet has said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6).

But why is the shepherd described as leaving his sheep in the wilderness? In John 10 Christ represents Himself as the Good Shepherd who receives His sheep into the sheepfold. When He takes them out He goes before them (Verse 4). Therefore, why did the shepherd leave the sheep in the wilderness? The answer is found in John 10:26. "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." Jesus had been talking with the Pharisees who sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2) and who claimed to be God's sheep. But they were not of His sheep. They were self-righteous and self-willed. Although they were of Abraham's seed in the flesh and nominally were of God's chosen nation, they did not hear the voice of Christ; therefore, they were not in His sheepfold. Instead they were out in the barren wastes of a spiritual wilderness. As spoken in Luke 18:9, the Pharisees "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."

Notice also, that when the shepherd had found the lost sheep he did not take it back to the wilderness where the ninety-nine were, but he took it home and called his neighbors together and rejoiced over the lost sheep that was found. Then Jesus said that there was more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine that need no repentance:

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

Certainly this was a clear reference to the self-righteous Pharisees who despised the publicans and felt they themselves had no need of repentance. But Jesus said "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

The parable teaches God's interest in the individual. Not even the most hopeless sinner is left to the cruel mercies of men, but rather he is individualized as an object of solicitude. God seeks him continuously and has unbounded joy in his recovery. For as Jesus said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

As the sheep was in exhaustion, powerless to return, so the sinner is helpless. The deeper the sense of sin, the greater the sense of hopelessness of any attempt to escape from the crushing load. To such a one the Saviour comes, bringing peace and security to the troubled heart, and taking him safely into His sheepfold.

Chapter 7

The Lost Piece of Silver

> "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:8-10).

This is a similar parable to that of the Lost Sheep. Nevertheless, it brings out additional truths. A woman had ten pieces of silver, one of which was lost. Concerned with her loss, she lighted a candle and swept the whole house, searching for it until she found it.

The Lord selected a piece of money, a silver piece, to represent man. The coin that was missing, therefore, represents a lost soul. The fact that the coin is of silver shows that the Lord chose that which was of highest value. (Gold coins were not in general use in those days, so the silver coin must be taken as the highest form of coin in general circulation.) The human soul, therefore, is regarded by God as something by its nature very precious.

On each coin there was a superscription. It has been generally recognized that this superscription in the parable speaks of the image of God in the soul of man, even as the image of the sovereign is stamped on the coin of the realm.

In the coin we have a double analogy: first, that the human soul is inherently precious in the sight of God, as silver is among the treasures of earth; and secondly, that man is distinguished from all other things of earth by having the imprint of the divine image upon him. And that is the reason that Christ welcomed the sinners who came to Him, because however dimmed the imprint was that image was still there upon the man.

As to the coin's being lost, we see a startling representation of the utter helplessness of man when he is lost to restore him to God. This is not brought out so perfectly in the *Parable of the*

Lost Sheep. In the story of the Prodigal Son, the other phase, man's responsibility to repent is dwelt upon. Thus we see why Christ found it necessary to resort to more than one parable to bring out the entire picture of man's lost estate and his relation to God.

In the case of the lost coin, where the piece of silver falls there it must lie. It has no power to change its position, any more than we can expect the piece of money to roll back out of the corner and leap again into the hands of the one who lost it. The whole human race would have been irretrievably lost had not Christ taken the initiative to come down to earth to save it.

Another thing, a piece of money does not lose its value by being lost; so the immortal spirit of man continues to be precious in the sight of God even when separated from Him. But although the lost coin does not lose its value, it is useless until it is in the hands of its owner. Moreover, in time it becomes tarnished and the image imprinted upon it becomes the more obscured the longer it is lost. Thus does silver, more than gold, show the sensitiveness of the human spirit to corruption. The soul separated from God soon loses the beauty of holiness and is quickly tarnished by contact with the evil around it.

Money in use has the power of bringing an increase (Matt. 25:27). But when it is lost this increase is sacrificed. So does the soul away from God go on to do evil and to injure the cause of the kingdom, and yields no return to God.

We find in the parable that circumstances are set in motion for the coin's recovery. The woman who possessed the coins counted her hard-won savings and discovered that one of the ten she had laid aside against a rainy day was missing. Dismay was written on her face, for the loss was not easy to bear. She decided that she had to institute a careful search, so took a candle and went looking through the house in likely places. She took her broom and swept and made a thorough search of the place. Every nook and corner came under her scrutiny, until perhaps in some grimy corner her search was rewarded and the missing silver was discovered.

Who is this woman who was employed in this earnest search of the lost coin? The shepherd who searches for the sheep surely represents Christ, and the father of the prodigal speaks of the Heavenly Father's receiving the penitent son, but this woman sweeping the house and searching by candlelight represents another. Who is it? Surely the woman represents the Church.

For Christ is not the only seeker of lost souls, but His followers are also. Thus did Christ say in His intercessory prayer, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). When Christ departed from the world He would leave His disciples behind. The task of seeking the lost would then fall to His followers. The Church seeks sinners just as her Lord did, and she is the woman who is seeking for the lost piece of money. As this parable follows the one of the Lost Sheep, so the work of the Church follows that of Christ.

But what is the candle? The candle is the Word. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet" (Psa. 119:105). Even as Christ is the light of the world, so the Church is the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). It is the Church that holds up the divinely-provided light. The carrying of the candle into first one part of the house and then another represents the Church's part in seeking for lost souls. Men do not readily search the Scriptures for themselves that their souls may be saved. It is the duty of the Church to carry the candle about until its light falls on that soul that is in the darkness, that he may be found and recovered. And as the woman searched diligently, even so must the Church work with all her might in the fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission. And though the tarnished silver may be hard to find, diligent search will surely reveal it.

Success at last crowned the efforts of the woman. In her joy she rushed out to tell her neighbors the good news. "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." Jesus drew the conclusion by repeating the words that there is joy in heaven over the salvation of one lost soul. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Clearly the aim of the parable is to show the joy among angels and men, and of Christ Himself on the reclamation of a lost soul. Our task then as the Church is to go into the dark places of the world with the light of the Gospel and go among the lowest of the low, those coated with the dust of sin, and recover them from the defilement of the world and the flesh and the devil.

For in the sinner that is away from Him, God feels a great sense of loss. With man life may be cheap, but never with God. Man made in the image of God has His imprint upon him. He is intended to fulfill God's purpose, to share is glory, and to enjoy God forever. What a loss to his Maker if he should fall away from his high calling and be lost forever!

Chapter 8

The Prodigal Son

> "And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him" (Luke 15:11-16).

If we were to read only the first two parables in this series, we should at once conclude that everything in regard to salvation for the sinner is done by God and that man has nothing to do. And if we were to read the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* only, we would assume that man himself does everything. The three must be taken together, one supplementing the other. God is supreme but man is free to make his choice; God alone saves, yet it is we who must make the decision of whether or not we accept salvation. We must consciously come to God or we will never be saved at all.

The *Parable of the Prodigal Son* is a remarkably true-to-life picture showing the contrast between youth with its gay thoughtlessness and carelessness, certain of its resources and self-sufficiency, and the man of mature years who has gone through bitter experience, who has been crushed with the sense of failure, and who is utterly powerless to recover himself.

So it was with the prodigal son who deliberately broke away from the restraints of home and took his life into his own hands without regard to the father's will. He began with a dream of liberty and unceasing pleasure. He ended up a slave tending swine, a picture of unmitigated misery.

We usually think of the prodigal son as representing the class of wastrels and profligates. Certainly he was such. However, there is much wider application of the parable than this. The son represents the teeming multitudes of many classes, nations, and races who are making the demand of the prodigal son, "Give me my share of the world's goods." Material goods were the height of his ambition; to him property was something that could be turned into money and the money into pleasure.

The parable begins with the words, "A certain man had two sons." It is far more personal than the sheep and coin parables. Christ uses the picture of the family circle, and the effect is heightened by the fact that the object of interest was limited to two sons in contrast to the ten coins or one hundred sheep of the first two.

The story is introduced with the younger of two sons asking the father for his share of the property. It seems evident that this request came because of his feelings toward the home life. The life that he wanted to lead could not be lived in that atmosphere. The routine of his father's home was too confining; it meant work, discipline, and obedience, all of which the son felt was unsuited to his soaring temperament. He wanted to push his fortune in the world. With the money at hand he wanted to enjoy to the full the attractions of the world and its sphere of pleasures.

It is to be observed that there was nothing at fault with the father, nor his treatment of his son, but the trouble was in the moral condition of the son himself. He desired things that were impossible to have and at the same time enjoy the parents' favor. He was prepared to sacrifice his father's love that he might have unrestricted liberty.

That he divulged all of his plans to the father is unlikely. He spoke as if he wished only to make a new beginning, and that he needed capital to get started. Though his plans did not contemplate work, he was quite content that his father should regard his request in that light.

The father gave his son what he asked. God gives to man freedom to make his own choice. The father, of course, was not deceived in the purpose that his son had in mind; nevertheless, he distributed his share of the property to him even though the boy would utterly forget the giver. Alas, the prodigal was one of that vast number who esteem the gifts of God more than the Giver.

The young man gathered all together and began his journey, anxious to widen the distance between him and his father's house.

His mind was full of plans and high expectations. As a bird to the snare he went and did not know it was for his life.

What happened to the young man? The story is quickly told. Far from home there were no restraints; passion had full sway and he gave himself over to an orgy of pleasure. "He wasted his substance with riotous living." With reckless prodigality he went through his money. And then, just as this unfortunate moment occurred a famine came upon the land.

The youth now made an astonishing discovery. He "came to himself." He awoke as from a bad dream, but it was not a dream; it was harsh reality. He had supposed that he was the only sane member of his family. Then he began to see differently. At home his father and brother had shown far too much interest in his doings, but suddenly nobody took any interest in him, not even in his most desperate need. Here we note something of significance. There was no letter from home; no messenger was sent after the youth; no earnest entreaty came for him to return home. This was a testimony of the father's deep displeasure at the conduct of his son.

The youth had spent his money in riotous living. He had plenty of fair-weather friends in the far country who were quite ready to help him spend his inheritance. It was great fun and he continued on day after day, ignoring the fact that his funds were rapidly dwindling until at last he had reduced himself to penury. And then, oh why did it have to happen just then, "a mighty famine" arose, one so severe that it brought distress on the whole country?

The fool's paradise had ended and the youth faced the facts of cold reality. The whirl of excitement was over and the hour of truth had come. Left without resources, the youth was hard put to know where to turn. In desperation he made an appeal for help to a citizen of that country. With an indifferent air this person sent him into the fields to feed swine—something no Jewish boy ever did. It was considered the very lowest kind of labor. He who had once conjured exciting thoughts of unmingled delight of the country where he thought he would be his own master, had at last found himself a slave reduced to a swineherd. The citizen did not bother to see that the prodigal even received board as wages. In his bitter extremity the young man sat down in the midst of the swine and gnawed on the husks. Sad indeed was the scene to which poverty had reduced him. We are told that "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat."

He thought of his former bosom companions who buzzed about him while he had money to spend, but his false friends had all left

him. While he had money they were willing to play his tune. Since he had become destitute they cast him off without a second thought. They had to look after themselves and they had no time for him. "And no man gave unto him." Alas, the youth had sunk to the level of the brutes which perish, as low or lower than the very swine.

Notwithstanding, the suffering he was going through was a valuable teacher. In the hour of calamity his thoughts turned back to the home he had so wickedly left. He remembered the forgotten faces, the kindly father, the well-set table where even to be a servant was a privilege. In thinking over these things we are told that the young man at last "came to himself."

> "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:17-19).

At home even those who held the humblest positions were kings in contrast to him. They all had plenty to eat while he was perishing with hunger. Subjection to his father had once seemed an intolerable burden, but he had a greatly-changed point of view. He looked upon service to his father, even as a lowest placed servant, as the finest thing in the world. So he said, "I will arise and go to my father." And those words proved to be the turning point of his life. There in his father's house he hoped to find rest for his burdened soul.

But the question is—how could he meet his father, and how could he give an account of his sin? He went away in pride and with the complacent air of one who had the world in his hand. He would return a beggar, his wallet empty, every eye in the house beholding his shame. There was only one thing to do. He had to go to his father and tell him that he had "sinned against heaven, and before thee."

Here in the parable Jesus brought out one of the most beautiful truths—the forgiveness of God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

The young man felt that it was too much to ask to be restored to the place of a son; he dared only ask for a place as a servant. Would his father accept him even on those terms? He did not know. It all lay in the hands of his father.

Greatly humbled, the penitent arose and began his long trek home. It must have been a miserable trip. He would have nothing to sustain him on the way save what he could beg. At times he was beset with doubts at the thought of the reception that might be his when he arrived at home. Only the faint hope that his father would receive him gave him strength to continue on.

Some might have thought that the father, having made no move to communicate with the son during all this time, had cast him off from his thoughts forever. But actually, the heart of the father had mourned continually for his erring son. This great sorrow threatened to bring his gray hairs down to the grave. Many a time he had looked down the way as if somehow he might spot the return of the long-lost son, though always in vain.

But he never ceased looking, and once more he lifted up his eyes—but could his eyes be believed? Was that the form of the prodigal? The figure was in tattered rags and the form was stooped, but it could not disguise the father's recognition. The father knew him in an instant, even while he was yet afar off. Then the father who would not go to seek his son nor entreat him to return, but who nevertheless had never ceased to watch day by day in hope of his reappearance, arose to go forth to meet him. The intensity of feeling long pent up in his heart broke forth, "and he had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." If others had doubted how he would receive his boy should he return, there was never any doubt in the heart of the father. He did not await the arrival of the son, but rushed forth to meet him. Before a word was spoken the welcome was made sure. In an instant the whole black past was rolled away forever.

In this way the Saviour portrays the love of the Father in heaven for the erring. This is how God acts to the returning penitent.

But welcomed as he was, the son could not leave the past unmentioned. And so he spoke, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." His confession was right. Not only had he sinned against the father, but more important he had sinned against heaven. There was no false-hearted excusing or covering of his conduct; there were no charges against others, but a clear confession of his own guilt.

But the son was overwhelmed with the welcome. He had intended to add in his resolution, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." But the atmosphere he had found was fatal to that idea. Indeed the reception intensified the son's feelings. He loathed

his sin and felt himself unworthy to be called a son, though he desired nothing more than to be completely under his father's authority again.

The prodigal son by no means represents only the profligate returning to the Father. He represents us all; as he has sinned, so have we. As he viewed his transgression as chiefly against God, so must we. As he confessed he was unworthy, so should we. This does not mean that all men go to the depths of iniquity this young man did; nevertheless, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and all must come penitently to God. Therefore, the prodigal's confession is suitable for all. Moreover, if the Father will accept a prodigal He will accept all.

Then the narrative passed to a description of the father's orders to the servants to prepare for the rejoicing. "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him . . . put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." To other servants he gave charge to kill the fatted calf.

But note one circumstance—the father's silence regarding the confession. There was no attempt on his part to make excuse. He received the confession; there was nothing that could be done to change the awful past. He had nothing to say about it, for the confession was true. But he did not open the wound afresh. He was mercifully silent about the sins of the young man. How wonderful that the Heavenly Father will never charge His penitent children with their past sins!

Soon the fatted calf had been killed and prepared. The son's filthy rags had been cast aside and he was attired in new garments. The whole house was then summoned to participate in the rejoicing and to celebrate the return of the prodigal. As the father said, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

The servants were making merry. Whom do they represent? The Lord Himself gives us the key in the other two related parables. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10).

But in the midst of the rejoicing, suddenly a note of discord was heard:

> "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in:

therefore came his father out, and intreated him" (Luke 15:25-28).

The elder son was returning from the field and heard the music and the celebrating. "What does this mean?" he asked one of the servants. When the answer came he broke out in anger. His brother was the black sheep of the family. He had disgraced them all, and the less the household heard of him and his doings the better. This was not the time for festivities, but discipline. What his scapegrace brother needed was a sound lecture he would not forget.

It can be seen that the older son was the prodigal then. The fact is that the father had had trouble with both sons. Neither obeyed him with a willing mind. Here we see the older son churlish and sour-faced, so angry he would not go into the house. Apparently his evil disposition was not something unexpected. There was no happy understanding between father and son. Outwardly the elder son was the better of the two; but in the end the younger came most quickly to give his father full-hearted affection.

It is significant indeed to note that when the younger son returned the father had sent no messenger to the field. The reason apparently was that the father could only expect his son's displeasure if he came, and that he would no doubt create a scene. The conduct of the father was the exact counterpart of his earlier attitude in sending no message to the prodigal while he was gone.

The elder son in a rage would not go into the house, so the father went out to entreat him. But he had to listen to a long complaint from his elder son. His words were marked by the uttermost bitterness of feeling. No son with any respect for his father could have spoken thus. With an injured air, he declared there was no fairness in his father's actions. He had for many years served him faithfully, never transgressing. Yet he had never received a kid to make merry with his friends.

> "And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf" (Luke 15:29-30).

In other words, according to the elder son the father was placing a premium upon unfaithfulness, prodigality and immorality. He had been obedient all these years and had no *reward* for faithful service, while "thy son" (he would not call him a brother) a reckless

spendthrift who had wasted all he had, was given a royal feast.

We note the contrast between the words of the two sons. The younger says he has sinned, while the elder said he never had transgressed; the younger said he had sinned against heaven, while the other made no acknowledgement of heaven; the younger said he was no longer worthy to be called a son, and the elder refused to acknowledge the younger son as a brother.

Nevertheless, the father continued to reason with his elder son. He was silent on his claim that he had never transgressed. But he dealt with his other charge. Had he never given the elder son anything? He had divided between the two all his living, and all that remained of the property belonged to the one who said he had nothing. The younger brother had indeed wasted his inheritance, but in this he had robbed himself and had made himself dependent on others.

And so the father said, "For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Previously the father had spoken of his brother as a son, but now he called him his brother to remind the selfish elder brother of what his feelings should be.

Who then is this elder brother? This question has been the matter of serious controversy. It is pointed out that he must represent a Christian, for the father says, "All that I have is thine." But then why should there be fierce denial that he had received anything?

The key to the question is this: The elder brother had indeed received temporal things from his father, but he had rejected his father's love which was worth infinitely more. The description of the elder brother is clear: (1) He claimed he had never transgressed. (2) He evidenced no pleasure in his father's service. (3) He felt that the father did an injustice by pardoning his profligate brother. There can be no true union with God until one returns to Him with the same spirit as the prodigal son. There can be no salvation as long as confession of sin is refused.

Chapter 9

The Pharisee and the Publican

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

In the preceding parable of the Prodigal Son, the truth was brought out that the Father desires men to come to Him in humility and with a broken and contrite spirit; such He will quickly receive. In this *Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican* we have a further view of the place that personal responsibility holds and the manner in which men should appear before God.

As the Prodigal Son came before his father in humble repentance and supplication, even so in this parable we are shown that to him who would receive forgiveness, prayer and supplication are the essential means to that end. Men do not attain to salvation by doing some notable deed of chivalry or performing some great exploit as the rich young ruler mistakenly thought was required, nor by great strivings of soul as Martin Luther at first supposed were necessary. Rather they have their names put on the roll of the saved by their acknowledgement of their sins and by simple faith in the Father, who forgives for Christ's sake.

This *Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican* introduces two characters as in the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*. The older brother said, "Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment."

This was spoken in the same spirit as the self-righteous Pharisee. On the other hand, the prodigal said, "I have sinned . . . and am no more worthy to be called thy son." This corresponds to the publican's cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The characters are thus the same, but there is a further development of the relating truths.

The parable began with two men going up to the temple to pray. Attention was called to the Pharisee first. He had been especially trained in his religion and he was a fair representation of his class. He took a prominent position and then began to pray as one who accounts himself as a special favorite of heaven.

The first words of the Pharisee's prayer forewarn the reader at once that something is wanting in his manner of approach to God. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." Instead of making supplication to God, in reality he was praying with himself! He claimed to be thankful, but only that he is "not as other men are . . . or even as this publican." The Pharisee was establishing a claim of precedence over other men by proclaiming his great piety. Indeed he was so preoccupied with his own self-righteousness that he even forgot to include the other Pharisees in his class but presented himself practically as a solitary example of perfection in the world. Moreover, he sought to establish the validity of his claim on the iniquities of others, and he made a charge against them as extortioners, unjust and adulterers!

The Pharisee charged that other men robbed where opportunity offered, and lived a life of self-indulgence, and when he saw the publican over against him he in disdain used him as an illustration to emphasize his claims.

The offensive character of the Pharisee's self-righteous disposition could scarcely be depicted in darker hues. It is a stark example of sheer hypocrisy and effrontery to God, and Christ declared it so. How different is the Pharisee's prayer from that of the psalmist.

> "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23-24).

The sketch that the Lord drew of the Pharisee's prayer is an accurate representation of all prayer based on self-righteousness. Of course, not all was wrong with the Pharisee. He acknowledged the evil of sin and gave thanks to God for deliverance from it. This is not wrong in itself. But the Pharisee's confession was perverted and his words were uttered in a way that amounted to little

more than self-praise. His self-glorification is not concealed by this guise of thanksgiving he threw over it.

As to supplication to God, there was none. His formal recognition of God was only a preliminary to a recitation or catalogue of his own excellences. It was, therefore, altogether a reverse of prayer.

Moreover, his self-righteous spirit was harsh in the judgment of others. It was also greatly inconsistent. With one breath the Pharisee claimed he had no sin, and in the next he said he fasted twice a week, as if he were greatly occupied in confessions. The Pharisee was altogether a ritualist occupied in observing fasts and calculating to a fraction of a penny his tithes on such small trifles as the produce of his garden. Thus does the spirit of formalism take concern for minute details and at the same time choke out the spiritual life.

We would suppose that few men would pray such a prayer as the Pharisee prayed; nevertheless, it accurately represents the suppressed thought in the minds of many who pray, and we remember that God reads the thoughts of men as well as their words.

From the prayer of the Pharisee we turn to that of the publican, which the Lord judges as a true prayer. That the publican belongs to no church or has not been considered a religious man is not taken into account. It is the sincerity, the earnestness and humility of the man who uttered the prayer that are considered.

We are told that the publican would not so much as lift his eyes toward heaven but beat upon his breast saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The prayer is a simple one, yet all-embracing. He acknowledged he was a sinner and cried for mercy. The Lord indicated that his prayer was an appropriate one for a sinner. The simplicity of that prayer should give hope to every soul burdened with sin that wishes to draw nigh to God.

The publican came burdened indeed to the foot of the throne of mercy. He had no thought of self-righteousness, but was deeply conscious of his guilt and sinfulness. And such is the example which Christ gives as the spirit in which men should approach God. It is to be noted that nothing was included in the prayer that gave the degree of aggravation of the publican's sin. If that had been mentioned the prayer would have been applicable only to this one case; but as it is, it has a universal applicability. It was as Peter's prayer that said, "I am a sinful man, O Lord."

The publican had an accurate view of his own sinfulness. He recognized the sin and evil in his heart. In some measure he saw himself as God saw him and he was repelled by it. He saw himself

as undone and that nothing he could do of himself could change the situation. There was nothing he could do to atone for his past misdeeds. But he appeared before God to acknowledge his sinfulness and to throw himself upon Him for mercy.

That he does this shows that he had some confidence in the mercy of God. This confidence is what we call "faith." And it is faith in God's mercy that lifts a man's spirit above the dark clouds of his own guilt and gives him hope of forgiveness. The publican did not expect God to excuse his sin, but indeed that His searching would be even more sweeping than his own. He had but one reason for confidence—that God is a God of mercy and that He would find a way to be a Saviour to him. And that is what Christ teaches in this parable—that God will be a Saviour to the penitent. But while God is a Saviour, the parable also teaches the necessity that the sinner himself call on Him in prayer to receive forgiveness. Mercy does not automatically forgive sinners; they must come as a penitent requesting God's grace on their behalf.

This, however, was quite lacking in the Pharisee's approach. It was not mercy he asked for, since in his estimation he had no need for mercy. His spirit was one of self-complacency. He came to testify he had need of nothing, while the publican declared he had need of everything. Thus the parable shows the great contrast between true and false prayers. Prayer has a most important place in the divine plan. It is not that God must be informed of our need, but we must ourselves feel the need and own that He alone can supply it.

And then the Lord gave the conclusion to the parable:

> "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

The publican's prayer was answered and he went forth a justified and saved man. The Pharisee on the other hand, departed as he came. He had need of nothing and he received nothing. The one man was justified; the other was condemned. The man who exalted himself was abased; the one who abased himself was exalted.

The parable teaches that the prayer of the self-righteous can never be answered, that it falls powerless to the ground. The publican's prayer, on the other hand, was answered without delay for it was the penitent's prayer. It was the prayer for which heaven has made abundant provision.

Chapter 10

The Friend At Midnight

> "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth" (Luke 11:5-8).

Jesus was at prayer. When He arose His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. In reply He gave them some instructions and then spoke this parable. It is one that clearly teaches the power of intercession.

According to the parable a man stood at the doorway of a friend at the midnight hour. Since he was exhausted with his travels, the man was greatly in need of food and rest. He was not a stranger, but was well-known and carried the claims of friendship.

It was midnight; and as there was no means of illumination on the open road travelling was dangerous. But the thought that he had a friend encouraged him to continue on until at last he arrived at his friend's house.

While the parable teaches hospitality, obviously its primary teaching concerns the spiritual. On the road of life darkness descends and the soul loses its way. Bewildered, the person turns to a friend for help in his distress.

Clearly Jesus in His teaching on prayer was warning His disciples that they should expect to be appealed to for help, and they had to be able to perform the necessary act of intercession for others.

Such is the case in the parable. In the middle of the night the man was awakened by knocking. Immediately he opened his home

to his friend. He lighted up the house and gave him a cordial welcome. This is the attitude that a Christian should have when anyone appeals to him for spiritual help.

But although the Christian can do much to encourage and help a sinner, there is a limit to what he can do for himself. The parable then showed the next step. Salvation is supernatural. It comes from heaven. No man can supply what is needed in himself. He must go to a friend who has the Bread of Life. The Friend is the Lord Himself. Jesus speaking on another occasion said, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:32-33).

We see the reason that Jesus represented the man who came at the midnight hour, for at that time of the night it would not be unusual to fail to have extra supplies laid in and of course it would be impossible to secure them at that hour from the usual channels. Jesus is thereby showing that from our human resources we have nothing to supply the wayfarer's needs.

Then comes the picture of the power of intercessory prayer to supply the anxious inquirer's wants. Since the householder had nothing to supply his friend, he left the house and hurried up the street to another friend. When he reached the door he did not hesitate to knock, and when he was heard he responded by explaining the circumstances which caused him to interrupt his neighbor's sleep.

The friend within appeared to be displeased by the disturbance and came up with a succession of excuses. He said to his caller, "Trouble me not." The door was shut and barred. The children were asleep. To get up and light the lamp and undo the fastening would wake up the house and might cause him considerable trouble to lull the children to sleep again. So he said, "I cannot rise and give thee."

What is Christ teaching at this point of the parable? Clearly He is showing that he who would be a winner of souls, an intercessor, will find many hindrances and obstacles that, if he allowed them, might tend to discourage him. He will be tempted when he meets these difficulties to give up.

But to do this would be a great mistake. The man at the door was in no mood to be denied. Even if it put a strain on the friendship, he was determined not to leave the house until his request be granted. So he continued to press his demands until he obtained what he needed.

Jesus is teaching importunity in prayer. If the man will not give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give what is needed. The analogy is not in the thought that God gives grudgingly or will only respond if He is intreated repeatedly, but rather that in the ministry of intercession there are obstacles put in the way by a third party. In Daniel 10 we are shown that there are active, intelligent, and evil powers that resist the one who prays and *importunity* is needed to break through.

When one sees the door shut and his petition is not answered, he should not despair, but continue knocking. That is the lesson that Jesus is teaching.

> "And I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9-10).

There are delays in prayer which cannot always be explained. God is represented as our Friend. That Friend "neither slumbers nor sleeps." There are none in His house to be disturbed by our calling. There is no period of the day that is untimely to Him. Nor can we by our continued coming weary Him.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as perseverance in prayer, and intercessory prayer is necessary for the highest blessings.

The beauty of the parable is that by reason of the three-fold friendship the ultimate result is obtained. Each of the three persons represented is spoken of as *a friend*. The friend who is travelling and has lost his way comes to the door of his friend at midnight. The friend who welcomes him in turn goes to the friend who can supply the need.

The friend obtains three loaves from his friend to give to his other friend. But why three? Do they not represent three things? First of all, there is the bread of salvation. We have already mentioned that. The sixth chapter of John contains a beautiful discourse on the bread of life. He that eats of this bread shall never die:

> "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6:47-50).

The promise of life eternal is wonderful indeed. But there is something more. There is something even for this present time. There is the bread of divine healing for those who have tasted

of the bread of life. The Syrophenician woman came to Jesus asking for the bread of healing, but in the wrong way. Jesus at first had to deny it to her:

> "But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs" (Matt. 15:26).

But the woman was not to be discouraged. She was willing to be considered even as a dog if she could have the crumbs from the Master's table. And when she said that, she reached the Master's heart and the Lord gave to her deliverance for her daughter.

What was the third loaf of bread? There is the bread that if a man eat he shall never hunger.

> "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

He that eats of the bread of life receives eternal life. There is a further eating, till one is truly satisfied. There is that bread of the Holy Spirit infilling that satisfies one's innermost being. We see that spoken of in the verses which follow:

> "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:11-13).

If a son ask bread of his father will he receive a stone instead? And if we ask bread of the Heavenly Father will He withhold? No, for the Heavenly Father will "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." The bread of the infilling of the Spirit satisfies the hungry soul forever.

Chapter 11

The Importunate Widow

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).

This parable has often been entitled the *Parable of the Unjust Judge*. But although the judge is mentioned first in the narrative, the widow is the conspicuous figure; and in the constant reference to her we find the key to the parable.

This parable teaches that men must never lose heart, but that they should continue to pray on regardless of hindrances or delays. This parable carried the thought of the importance of importunity even more than the *Parable of the Friend at Midnight*. In that parable the neighbor, though not especially obliging, was not a mean man, and the petitioner had reason to believe that his request would be granted. Then Jesus, to emphasize His point, employed two contrasting characters—a poor persecuted widow without influence and an unscrupulous judge who we are told feared not God nor regarded public opinion. The lesson is that if this irreligious judge would not be persuaded to give the widow woman justice, she would plague him by her continual coming until he would do it.

That God should in a way liken Himself to an unjust judge is remarkable, and as has often been said, we would never have done

it on our own responsibility. One writer says, "Only because it has been supplied by the Lord Himself do we escape a feeling of discomfort in instituting a comparison with one who has become notorious for injustice."

Let us now examine in detail the parable. The woman was a poor widow. We are not told whether she had a family grown up and gone away. But the point is that her husband was dead and there was no one to share her burdens. Since she had no husband she faced a new trial, one that arose out of the great selfishness of human nature. Weakness invites attack. Someone involved in her affairs, possibly a dishonest executor of the estate left by her husband, took advantage of her inexperience and was mean enough to appropriate for himself what was rightfully hers. Thus the poor woman found that between the loss of her husband and her property, her security was imperiled.

Having suffered this injustice, she went to the court of the land hopefully seeking redress. She appealed to the judge who was in the seat of authority. But alas, justice had been perverted. The judge feared neither God nor man. He saw in the widow a woman who had no influence, who could give him nothing in return if he should help her. No doubt if she were able to offer him a fair bribe his ear would have been open to her plea. But the judge is an irreverent man; since he had no fear of God he saw no reason to waste his time with such an insignificant person.

It is a sad picture indeed. She had come to the right place; she looked for protection where she had a right to expect it. But instead she was turned rudely away. She went back to her home with a heavy heart to feed upon her sorrow.

Nevertheless, she had not given way to despair. She would not surrender all hope. She returned again to renew her request, but succeeded only in further annoying the judge who ordered her to depart. Does not this picture illustrate the experience of many who pray for deliverance and yet appear to receive no answer to their prayers?

The woman, however, was persistent. Back again she came. A brief moment was given for another sham hearing, but no word of encouragement escaped the judge's lips and once more she went away. Still she came again hoping for a better response, but it was always the same. Cold indifference was all she received.

But did she give up? No, she went again to the judge. The woman was by then a familiar sight at the court and the attendants exchanged knowing looks when she appeared on the scene with her request for justice. But time after time she left the court with a heavy

heart. Surely she was ready to accept defeat. Would it not be better for her to cease wasting her strength in a quest that was apparently hopeless? She might as well give up in despair to her sorrows.

But no. Again she was back at the court, and this judge who regarded neither God nor man saw with dismay the unwelcome figure appearing at the door once more. How long would this creature keep annoying him, he asked himself. Finally the judge gave in. It would be easier to grant her request and get it over with than to be continually pestered and harassed by this woman. He granted her petition, perhaps under the guise of performing a pure act of justice for a poor widow woman.

The parable thus encourages persistent prayer. Every element in it inspires the supplicant to press through. The woman was weak, oppressed, friendless, and without influence. The judge feared no one. The Lord apparently selected such a case to give cheer and encouragement to those who are overwhelmed by distress and misfortune, that they might know that their prayers, like those of Cornelius "are had in remembrance before God," and though the answer does not yet appear, if they continue in prayer—never fainting—the answer is bound to come.

> "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" (Luke 18:7).

Now we come to a further truth of the parable. There we see the range of its teaching taking on a prophetic aspect involving not the prayer of one supplicant, but the prayers of the whole Church of Jesus Christ—the prayers not merely of just one generation, but all generations down to the actual hour of the coming of Christ.

First, we are to understand that some prayers by the nature of the case cannot be answered at once. There are prophetic and dispensational elements involved. Consider the saints who went to the stake during the dark centuries of the medieval church. Even in our time millions have perished in Russia and other communist countries because of their faith. They are like those in Old Testament days who did not receive deliverance, but looked forward to a better resurrection. Christ anticipated that some should give their lives for the cause of Christ, thus winning a martyr's crown.

The cry of the saints is a just one. Those that cry to him night and day will surely be heard. But this does not necessarily mean that they will escape death on this earth. The few years here are short indeed in comparison to the glory that is to be revealed in the future.

Indeed, if Jesus tarries all of us must leave this scene of action. But this is not the end. The saints in paradise, though in a state of comparative rest, continue to pray in heaven for the end of the reign of evil on earth and the appearance of the Kingdom of God. The apostle John saw the picture under the fifth seal:

> "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (Revelation 6:9-11).

Here were the faithful martyrs and those who had sealed their faith with their own blood, crying out to God as to how long things would continue as they were on earth, how long evil would triumph and how long the wicked would prosper? They prayed for an answer as to when Satan's rule would end and the kingdom of God be set up? And the answer came. They were told that the time was almost at hand. White robes were given to each one in anticipation of the approaching hour of victory. For soon, very soon, the kingdoms of this world would become the kingdoms of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a peculiar form of expression in the words, "Though he bear long with them." The passage may refer to the saints themselves—He hears their cries of oppression and notes the delay of justice. But it can also have reference to withholding judgment and retribution upon the wicked, for God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

This latter gives the key to why some prayers are delayed though saints pray long to be delivered from evil. If the answer to the prayer involved only the persons themselves, there would be little delay. But God had another responsibility in delaying, that He might exercise mercy and forbearance in dealing with the wicked that they might have full opportunity to come to repentance. Thus do the saints become partakers of Christ's sufferings.

But the question is, why should the Lord compare the Heavenly Father with an unjust judge, of all things? On the surface it is puzzling. It must be noted that the conduct of the judge is expressly condemned. His character is depicted as exceptionally dark. He fears neither God nor man; moreover, he boasts of his impiety.

Nevertheless, the judge in his position does represent divine authority (Romans 13:1-5), in that God has ordained law and order and this judge on earth is even as God is in heaven, the court of last resort. In this particular instance we see the unjust judge settling the claims of others by his own caprice; he assumes the prerogative of deity, claiming by his own will to dispose of the destinies of men.

In this, the key to the parable appears. If an unjust judge who assumes the prerogative of deity will because of a widow's importunity grant the decree she desired, how much more will God grant justice to those who trust in Him, though He delay long in meting out judgment upon the oppressors. Then Jesus said, "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily."

The parable closes with a surprising and startling question. Jesus says, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" What is the answer to this question? It is one that Jesus left unanswered, and for a good reason; *we are the only ones who can answer it!*

But let us be sure we fully understand the meaning of the question. Is Jesus here referring to salvation faith? Surely not. Clearly there are enough Scriptures to show us that there will be saints on earth at the time of His coming. This being so, it is obvious that the Lord is referring to another kind of faith. It is the supernatural faith. It is the operation of the very gift of faith. There are many who have faith in the goodness of God, but not so many who will stand out on His promise where the element of danger is involved. It is the faith that stays steady like that of the widow, which refuses defeat when all evidence in the natural is against it. It is a faith that sees victory even at an hour when evil seems to be prevailing on the earth, a faith that believes that God hears and answers when there is no physical evidence of an answer.

Therefore, the Lord asks whether when He returns He shall find such faith in the earth? This is a question that He does not answer. For it is not up to God whether we will have or will not have that faith. He has made it available. It is up to us whether or not we will reach out and accept it.

Part 3:

The Sermon on Seven Parables

The Sermon of the Seven Parables

This is the second group of the parables in the *Life of Christ* series. As we have previously noted, the parables in a unique way illustrate the major truths of the Gospel. These gems of which there are none comparable in all literature, beautifully unfold the great principles of the Kingdom of Heaven.

These parables spoken by Jesus to the multitude from a boat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee have a special relationship to each other. The discourse foretells what will be the reception of the Gospel by the various kinds of people who hear it. The *Parable of the Sower* separates the hearers into four groups, typified by four kinds of soil which the seed falls upon—only one of which brings forth fruit.

These parables clearly reveal that the Kingdom of Heaven is the sphere of Christian profession on earth. It contains both wheat and tares, good fishes and bad fishes, the good Word of God against the leaven of evil.

These seven parables give a prophetic foreview of developments in the Church visible during this dispensation. Its small beginning is portrayed by the mustard seed, which is the smallest of seeds. But eventually even as the small mustard seed grows into a tree, the Kingdom of Heaven would experience a similar unhealthy growth. In time, even as the birds of the air find lodging in the tree, so the emissaries of Satan would find shelter in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The place of Israel and the Church is shown in the *Parables of the Hidden Treasure* and *The Goodly Pearl.* The final conclusion at the end of the age is depicted in the *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.* At this time the tares are separated from the wheat and are burned. The same truth is taught in the *Parable of the Good and Bad Fishes.* The good are separated forever from the bad.

Included with the seven parables preached beside the seashore is the *Parable of the Unconscious Growth,* which appears to have a definite relation to the seven. These eight parables are worthy of a close study by the Bible student as they are a remarkable prophetic foreview of developments within the Kingdom of Heaven during this age.

Chapter 12

The Parable of the Sower

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:1-9).

The sermon of the seven parables is a distinct and unique composition with a purpose clear and distinct. The discourse explains what will be the reception of the Gospel by the various classes of people who hear it. The sermon assumes that they have already had opportunity to know something of Christ's kingdom and have had time to show their disposition and reaction to it.

In each of these seven parables the expression, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto" occurs. What does it mean? It is simply a figure of speech which serves better than a long definition. Everyone knows what *a king* and *a kingdom* means. The Kingdom of Heaven is God's kingdom being introduced into the hearts of men living in this world. Some day it will swallow up all other kingdoms, and then He to whom it belongs will come and reign over it. But first He must reign over men's hearts. The Kingdom of Heaven, therefore, is the sphere of Christian profession on earth.

The sermon of the parables was delivered in the open air. Seated at first by the seaside, the pressure of the multitude be-

came embarrassing and the Lord resorted to the expedient of launching out in a boat from the shore. There before Him were thousands seated in a listening attitude upon the beach. What a sea of faces must have met His gaze!

Now to the *Parable of the Sower*: It concerns the fate of the Gospel to the people to whom it was preached. One might think that the Gospel with its good tidings when truly and faithfully preached would bring salvation to everyone who heard it. The Word brought worlds into existence, light out of darkness, life out of death; yet according to the parable only about one-fourth of those who heard it were saved by it. Why? This is a mystery which the parable explains.

The parable begins with the sower, who is Christ, going forth to sow the seed, which is the Word of God. Men are born again by the Word. "Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Pet. 1:23). Thoughts are things, and words are things which germinate and give forth to action. How much more the Word of God.

The seed is therefore the Word of the kingdom; and the field is the world, not geographically, but ethnologically—meaning the whole social order, including all people of all tribes and nations. The field has four kinds of soil, each pointing to a different class of hearers. Four is the world number and in this case indicates the entire human race.

Let us now note the four different kinds of soil and the different classes represented by them.

The Soil by the Wayside

> "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side" (Matt. 13:18-19).

As the sower goes forth to sow, some of the seeds "fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up." The soil had been rich and abundant, but it had been rendered unreceptive by reason of its hardness. Why was the soil hard? It may have been hard by reason of its unresponsive nature, or perhaps because of influences that had been brought to bear upon it. Many are hardened because of circumstances and experiences they have had in life. Perhaps at one time the soil had been stirred up, but

after a while the person settled back into a state of indifference. There are no hearts so hard as these. Many hearts become hard because divine influence has moved upon them and they have resisted it until finally the Spirit of God has been withdrawn. God says, "My spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3). Of Ephraim it is said, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos. 4:17). It is written that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but not until the king hardened it first (Exod. 5:2; 7:22).

Yet there is hope for this soil if it can only be stirred up. Many a hardened and calloused man has had the hard core punctured, and has in the end brought forth the best fruit in the field.

But there was another danger to these kinds of hearers. They cannot wait for a more favorable season. The grain lies on the surface of the hard ground. The birds of the air come and devour the seed. According to Jesus, the birds of the air represent the evil one. The devil has many agencies at work and they come and steal away the seed that is sown in the heart until finally it is all lost. No fruit, therefore, is brought forth in their lives.

The Seed That Fell On The Stony Ground

A second class of hearers is represented by the stony ground. A thin layer of soil lies upon bedrock. The soil is good but there is not enough of it. The result is that when the grain falls upon it, it germinates quickly, springs up and gives promise of bearing a substantial harvest. But since the rock hindered its roots going down, it put forth its energies upward into the stock. But alas, as there was little soil and moisture to feed the plant, it was unable to resist the scorching sun so it withered and died. This kind of upward soil represents the superficial and impulsive hearers of the gospel:

> "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matt. 13:20-21).

This class of hearers received the Word with joy. And this is as it should be. When Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans there was much joy in that city. But the joy of this class of hearers sprang from contemplation of great benefits to be received without consideration of the costs, hazards, and sacrifices involved. These people were like the rich young ruler, who desired eternal life but could not pay the price. These are they who observe that

which is fair and beautiful in Christianity, its lovely teaching, but do not realize that following Christ means a hard war against Satan, the world, and sin.

Not having roots, when trial and persecution come they fall away. They have no roots, no stability. By contrast, faith in the unseen causes the true Christian to count the present affliction light in comparison to the coming glory (II Cor. 4:17-18). The same trials and afflictions that overthrow others only cause him to send his roots down deeper.

The stony soil hearers that Jesus described are very numerous. They are found in every evangelistic campaign. You see them in church for a while. But when trials and temptations come and their friends persecute them, they become disheartened and lapse back into their old life.

The Soil That Was Choked With Thorns

> "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hearest the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22).

In this case nothing is said about the soil's being hard or too thin. It was deep and apparently well-cultivated, but the trouble was that it was sown with another kind of seed—that of thorns. Wheat and thorns cannot grow together and both prosper. The soil can only give so much nourishment. The stronger will choke out the weaker. Weeds grow the rankest and fastest. Thorns outdistance the growth of grain. They crowd in upon the wheat, shutting out the air and light and drawing away from the good seed the moisture and nourishment necessary for growth. Thus the grain is dwarfed and stunted and unable to bring forth a harvest.

So it is with a mind in which the truth of God does not have room to grow. People get deeply involved in the cares of life. They are absorbed in meeting the hazards and difficulties of business in which they are engaged. Or if they enjoy material prosperity, the deceitfulness of riches gives them such satisfaction that they have less and less time to give to spiritual things. For in the mind, as in nature, the weeds grow the quickest. Evil tends to flourish, rather than the good.

The pleasures of life hinder others. The world has its enticements and its allurements. There is the pleasure of worldly amusements that distracts and crowds out spiritual things. Many are trying to grow a crop of Christianity and worldliness at the same time. They

seek to grow a double harvest. Of course, these things can only result in failure. In the end these people bring no fruit to perfection.

The Soil That Brought Forth Some Thirty, Some Sixty And Some An Hundredfold

> "But he that receiveth seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt. 13:23).

But not all the seeds fail to bring forth. There is that class of hearers spoken of as the good ground that brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. The sower may sow in hope, knowing that his labors are not in vain. Some of the earth will bring forth. And what is the secret of the good ground? Luke speaks of this as "they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). The question is, how can any heart be made "honest and good" before the Word of God makes it so? The answer is that some work had to be done on the soil before the seed fell upon it. The sower had to put his plow and harrow to it. There must be the agency of the Holy Spirit upon the heart before it will produce. We speak of this as conviction of sin. Without this deep conviction there cannot be true conversion. There may be intellectual faith such as the second class had (Luke 8:13), but it is not the faith produced as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, true preaching of the Gospel must carry that element that brings about real repentance.

And so the good soil brings forth some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. The Sower desires the greatest possible return. He said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Those who bring forth fruit thereby produce seed for a new sowing, and thus become sowers with Christ.

Chapter 13

The Tares

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13:24-30).

The *Parable of the Sower* has not told us the whole story. There is an additional matter that needs explanation about the field of the sower. The second parable is a sad but necessary supplement to the first; and there is a change of structure. In the former the seed represented the Word of God. In this a comparison is made between the good and bad seed; "the good seed are the children of the kingdom," and "the tares are the children of the wicked one." The analogy is correct. We are born of "incorruptible seed," the seed of the Word of God (I Peter 1:23). The good seed produces true believers.

There are two sowers. One is the Lord, and the other is the evil one. In the previous parable Christ is portrayed as the Sower of good seed. He has the right to sow the field, since He bought it and it belongs to Him. The world is potentially redeemed since Christ purchased it by His blood. He sows in it good seed which becomes "the children of the kingdom."

"The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the

kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one" (Matt. 13:38).

We are told that there is another sower, an enemy. The world is a divided kingdom. Although Christ rules over many subjects, there is an enemy who also holds sway over a vast number—those who elect to serve him. The presence of this adversary engages our attention. Having observed the Lord sowing the good seed, he purposed to sow evil seed. But although the first sower worked in the daytime, the enemy works in the night. He sows evil seed that produce tares, which are the children of the evil one. His work is done stealthily, for he desires to conceal himself if possible.

This is an important mark of Satan's strategy to masquerade and keep men from discovering his identity. It is amazing how well he has succeeded. Many books on the life of Jesus deal devoutly with His teaching until they come to the subject of Satan. Then suddenly they seem to feel the need of apologizing for what He taught. They say that Jesus was subject to the error of His age and that He imagined there were demons, although none such things exist. Some, even in Full Gospel circles, have failed to realize the part that demons play in causing sickness and disease. Satan desires to conceal his work, since if he can disguise his identity men will not know how to counteract his work. In this he has been quite successful.

We are told that while men slept the devil came and sowed his evil seed, or tares. The mischief was done "while men slept." The words of the parable are very suggestive. In other words, men were at fault. The parable is speaking a spiritual truth and refers not to physical sleep, but to the fact that those who were watchmen of the field failed to be on the alert as they should have been. Had they been watching they would have spied the enemy and frustrated his efforts.

The Church, had she been on the watch, could have prevented the rise of the evil cults; but either she was not on the alert or else tried to use methods that were not in accordance with Christ's instructions. We will note this presently.

Today we witness the vast multitude of tares that have been sown, Christian Science, Jehovah Witnesses, Spiritualism, Mormonism, Unity, and a host of others are a few examples of cults which have arisen. They all work in the same subtle manner. They distribute their literature quietly. People wake up in the morning and find it under their doors.

It will be noted that all of these religions have a superficial identity with Christianity. For a long time the growing tares, or darnel, look like the true wheat. For this reason they are sometimes called "bastard wheat." While early in its growth it cannot be distinguished from the true grain, at a latter stage anyone can tell the difference. What the devil sows is "bastard wheat," and it is not surprising that great numbers of people are fooled believing it is true wheat. It is for this reason that the false cults attract so many people. Their teaching resembles Christianity, but they possess something that Satan has sown within them that is lethal to the soul.

We are told that when the wheat had sprung, lo, there was this bastard wheat, or counterfeit Christianity. The tares are spurious, or counterfeit. Christians who can scarcely be distinguished from the geniune are like the tares. It is a great mystery as to how Satan sows his evil seed and produces children of the devil; but it is true, and the Church has faced this from the Early Church to the present time. J. J. Ross has made the following remarks concerning this in his book *The Kingdom Mystery.*

> "In the church to which John sent his letter (I John 3:10), there were two families—those born of God, and 'the children of the devil.' These two families were set forth at the very beginning of human history by Cain and Abel. Cain, the first-born, though religious was of the evil one, while Abel, the second-born, representing those born of the Spirit, was of God. The children of the devil are not out and out blasphemers and wicked persons generally; they are those who profess to be Christians, having been baptized, have their names enrolled upon the church register, and perhaps are even engaged in some form of Christian service, but have never been born from above. Like Cain, they are religious without the blood, having their offerings rejected because they, themselves, have not been accepted. The devil is a great counterfeiter. He has been counterfeiting the work of God from the very beginning. After the prophets, false prophets; after apostles, false apostles; after Christ, anti-Christ; after the true ministers of the Gospel, false ministers of the Gospel; after true Christians, false Christians. Among the apostles there was a Judas, and it was difficult to distinguish him from the real and genuine. In the church of Jerusalem, there were an Ananias and a Sapphira. In the church of Samaria, there was a Simon Magus, who, though he had professed Christianity and had been baptized and had become a member of the church, yet, was 'in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.' From the very midst

of the church in Ephesus, there arose wolves in sheep's clothing, who imitated the true, and sought to fleece the genuine sheep. In the church of Pergamos there were the Balaamites, and the Nicolaitans. Underneath the same roof, in the same building, there was the true Church of God, and the synagogue of Satan. Right down through this age there have been spurious or counterfeit Christians produced by the devil."

Although at first the two kinds of plants appear similar, the time comes when the discovery is made that a disaster has befallen the crop. The servants learn that mingled in with the grain is the bastard wheat, or tares. They are greatly troubled over what has happened. The power of evil in the world has always distressed God's people. Why is wickedness permitted if we have an all-wise and all-powerful God? The answer lies in the fact that men are by creation made free moral agents. And as such they must be free to accept or reject both the good and the evil. If men will not accept the good they find themselves inevitably in the throes of evil.

The servants were much concerned with how to get rid of the tares. They said, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" In their opinion this seemed the best thing to do. Their advice was to use violence. They would destroy evil wherever they found it. Youthful disciples are especially inclined to this policy. James and John thought to call down fire from heaven and destroy the Samaritans who rejected Christ.

But the servants needed the guidance of their master; he restrained them saying, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." The time of separation was not yet. This was a task that was beyond human capacity. The master commanded them to allow both to grow together until the time of harvest, when the tares would be gathered together by the angels and cast out of the kingdom. Tares sometimes look like children of the kingdom. And children of the kingdom sometimes look like tares.

It is sad that the church did not always heed the advice of the Master in this respect. During medieval times the church developed the inquisition which used every diabolical means of torture to eradicate what they thought were the tares. Men were burned at the stake, put on the rack, pulled limb from limb, thrust into torture chambers, all in an attempt to uproot the heretics. In their ill-conceived efforts they took the lives of millions of true Christians. The truth was that the tares were actually destroying the wheat!

Separation ultimately is inevitable. At the end of the age the Lord will send forth His angels, and they will take out the tares and cast them into the furnace of fire.

> "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:41-42).

That will be a day of deliverance for the children of the Lord. Alas, for the children of the evil one! They will be consigned to the furnace of fire. And "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Chapter 14

The Mustard Seed

> "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field" (Matt. 13:31).

When the Lord had spoken seven of the parables and had given explanations of the first and second of them, He asked the disciples a question, "Have ye understood all these things?" (Matt. 13:51). They answered, "Yea, Lord." The question is, how did the disciples come to understand the parables of which several were unexplained? Obviously they got their key from the first two He had explained. The point is that if we would understand the parables we must pay close attention to those the Lord did explain. In the *Parable of the Mustard Seed* we have a foreview of the unnatural growth of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Keeping our interpretation in harmony with that which was taught in the first two parables, let us consider the meaning of the *Parable of the Mustard Seed.* Since the sower of the seed previously was Christ, we may therefore conclude that He was the sower here. As the "field" mentioned in the other parables represented the world, we shall also consider its having the same meaning in this one—the world of mankind, or the special order of this age.

What is the seed that is sown? "The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed." Previously in the first parable the seed was the Word of God, and in the second "the children of the kingdom," in whose hearts the word of the kingdom had been sown. The seed is not Christ, as some would teach, but the Word, the doctrine, the teaching of Christ.

The mustard seed is the word of faith, extremely small, but containing enormous possibilities. Jesus in Matthew 17:20 says, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Hence the planting of this

seed of faith has power to remove mountains, to produce miracles. There is something miraculous and supernatural about the development of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Again the mustard seed from a small beginning grows rapidly. There is scarcely any other plant which has power to grow so fast and produce so great bulk. So the Kingdom of Heaven, from a very insignificant beginning, has had an amazing development, although we must observe that this growth has in many respects been unsubstantial. Today there are well over half a billion professing Christians on earth, but not nearly this number of genuine believers.

At the beginning nothing seemed to show less promise than the Kingdom of Heaven. Today Christendom is the dominating religious force on earth, although indeed it has become mixed with much that is not Christian. This Kingdom of Heaven contrasts with the kingdoms of the world. Earthly kingdoms are considered great because of their size, their wealth. But the heavenly kingdom is great because of its poverty. In earthly kingdoms men achieve greatness by reason of their authority; but in this kingdom men are great because of their humility and their willingness to serve. It was not a kingdom in which men boasted of its size and its magnificence but Jesus spoke of it as a "little flock." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). A great kingdom generally considers itself great because of its ability to conquer others. But of the Kingdom of Heaven men are commanded not to resist attack, but when smitten on one cheek they are to turn the other (Matt. 5:39-40).

This seed then which is considered "the least of all seeds" is the doctrine of Christ. His teaching which He presented in the world was done in the simplest and humblest manner. It was for this reason that at the beginning these doctrines of the kingdom attracted only the lowest, the poorest, most despised and the most insignificant persons.

But now we notice its remarkable power of growth. Although its beginning was small and humble, the mustard seed, "when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree" (Matt. 13:32).

The description is accurate. In warm countries such as Palestine the mustard plant grows and attains a remarkable size, perhaps ten or twelve feet high. The fact that such a plant or tree could come from so small a seed was naturally a wonder to those of

Jesus' day. It is still a wonder. People are surprised that anything so small could grow into something so big and so grand so quickly.

There must be a reason why the Lord chose the mustard as a type in this parable. There is something about it that made it appropriate in the Lord's description of the Kingdom of Heaven. Most herbs follow the law of their kind. They abide in the limits assigned to them. The mustard seed apparently transgresses the divinely set limits of nature. When given the right kind of soil and climate, it will shoot up to abnormal size and height in an extremely short time. In other words, it deviates from the ordinary laws and order of nature. It is a prodigy.

Apparently the peculiar growth of the Kingdom of Heaven made it necessary for the Lord to search diligently for something to which He could liken the abnormal growth. In Mark and Luke He says, "Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?" It was difficult to find in nature the kind of plant that overstepped or transgressed the laws of nature. The Lord found one in the mustard seed. It became a plant that grew so rapidly and abnormally that it made the perfect illustration. The mustard seed grew, and instead of remaining as an herb it became a tree.

A tree is often used in the Scriptures as a symbol of earthly greatness or haughty pride. It was this symbol that was used of Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (Dan. 4:10-12, 20-22). In Ezekiel 31 the Egyptian Empire under Pharaoh is represented as a tree exalting itself over other trees. In our parable we see the mustard tree as it were, exalting itself in pride and power and authority over the nations of the earth. After the fall of the Roman Empire the Church began its course of exaltation, until finally under the Holy Roman Empire it made pretensions to exercise authority over all nations, crowning or deposing kings at will.

According to Mark this tree had shot forth great limbs. In the beginning the Church in each community was independent of the other, with Christ as the head. But in the course of time local assemblies became incorporated under a human head. Thus Christendom has become like the trunk of a tree that continually subdivides into smaller and smaller branches. In the great branches we see the powerful hierarchies with their wealth, power, human leadership and false teachings.

When the Church was small and unnoticed, the great of the world were not attracted to it, but when it grew in power and

wealth and learning it was a distinction to belong to it. The tree, with its great branches, now includes over 200 denominations, as well as innumerable cults. And thus the Kingdom of Heaven represented by the mustard tree continues to grow higher and to shoot forth more and more branches. Attempts to bring about an organic union of all these bodies into one will be totally unsuccessful. (There will, however, be a union in Spirit of God's people in answer to Christ's prayer in John 17:21, but that is not the subject under discussion in the parable.)

There is one more circumstance of which we must take note. We are told that "the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Mark puts it, "so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it." The context implies they are not domestic fowls, but wild birds of the air. Some of them may have possessed beautiful plumage, but they are wild creatures. The size of the tree had deceived the birds into mistaking the herb for a tree of the forest.

What are these birds? Some have declared that they symbolize the multitudes that come to the shelter in the shadow of the Church, seeking its protection. They take these winged fowl as representing new converts to Christianity. But in so doing they ignore Christ's own definition of the significance of birds, or their symbolic meaning as shown in other parts of the Scriptures.

Thus in Genesis 15:11, the fowls of the air are shown to be the destroyers of the sacrifice that Abraham was presenting to God. And there are such in Christendom today, some holding professorial chairs who are destroying the teaching of the blood sacrifice. In other places the birds of the air are represented as those who feast on the dead carrion (Matt. 24:28), or the slain of the Lord (Rev. 19:17-18). Wicked Babylon, the counterfeit bride, is spoken of as a "cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. 18:2). In the prophecy we see unclean spirits represented as a cage of filthy and hateful birds sheltered and protected by Babylon.

Christ Himself in His interpretation of the first two parables shows beyond question the significance of the term "birds". He tells us of the birds that came and devoured the seed. He explained then that they represented the wicked one, or the devil. "Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." The thievish birds of the air are the enemies of the sower, even the Son of Man. Where they have opportunity they swoop down and take away the seed, so that the soil brings no fruit to perfection. The birds represent wicked men and women

who profess to be Christians, but who are actually emissaries of Satan. They come to the tree from the air, even as Satan is the prince and power of the air (Eph. 2:2).

That these people whom the birds represent are attracted to the great institution of Christianity is natural. When the mustard plant was small there was no room for them, but when it overstepped its bounds and became a tree, shooting forth branches and limbs, it provided a convenient place for them to find food and shelter and to build their nests. In other words, when the visible church became wealthy and worldly and divided itself into great denominations, the people of the world were attracted to it for the material advantages it offered.

The teaching of the parable may, therefore, be summed up as follows:

(1) Christ planted the mustard seed which represents His Word, in the field, or the world, and has left it to grow as it will.

(2) From the small seed it became a tree, a system of religion that grew into an institution of pride and power which is in contrast to His original teachings of humility and meekness.

(3) The final aspect of the tree as Christendom, which originally was intended to make war against Christ's enemies, has instead afforded a habitation and roosting place for them. In the Early Church the disciples of Christ made great advances in their efforts to destroy the kingdom of Satan, but in time the Church became proud and worldly, and instead began to offer a place of security to the emissaries of Satan where they may seduce and destroy the Church itself. Such is this mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven, as revealed in the *Parable of the Mustard Seed.*

Chapter 15

The Leaven

> "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).

It is claimed by many otherwise good expositors that the *Parable of the Leaven* represents the subtle effusion of the Gospel throughout the world, till all are converted, that the present social order which is essentially evil, will through the preaching of the Gospel become changed, and the whole world will become converted to Christ.

This interpretation is open to fatal objections. In the first place, it contradicts the teaching of other kingdom parables, such as that of the tares. There will be tares among the wheat until the end of the age.

Second, leaven is never employed as a symbol of the Gospel, but invariably it is used in a bad sense, as indicating evil which causes corruption. If the leaven is made to mean the action of the Gospel upon the hearts of men, then the parable boldly predicts that every soul will be made holy by the Church. This teaching, however, is contrary to the whole current of New Testament teaching. Jesus indicated that the age would end with moral and social conditions similar to those in the days of Noah, just before the flood:

> "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:38-39).

Why then do so many fail to teach that leaven is a symbol of evil? It is because they cannot see that the Kingdom of Heaven can have any evil in it. The parable opens with the words, "The

kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven." They cannot see that the Kingdom of Heaven contains evil in any sense. But in the position they take, they fail to understand what the Kingdom of Heaven is. The Kingdom of Heaven represents professing Christendom. It has wheat and tares, good fishes and bad fishes, and evil birds in it. The Kingdom of Heaven, therefore, represents the whole Christian world, including Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant churches. It is only through the saved people in the churches that God reigns. In addition, there are vast numbers of unsaved people in all of them.

In order to understand the meaning of this parable, it is necessary that we carefully study each part of the picture and see the meaning of all the elements that form a part of it.

First, there are three measures of meal. "Three measures" were used by Sarah when she prepared a meal for "the three men" (the theophany) who met Abraham on the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18: 6). Gideon took three measures of meal when he presented the offering to the Angel of Jehovah (Judges 6:19). Likewise, when Hannah sent up to Shiloh to consecrate her child to the service of the Lord, she carried the ephah, or three measures of meal offering (I Sam. 1:24). We are also told that the ephah was the pot in which the meal offerings for the tabernacle were prepared (Lev. 5:12, 6:20; Num. 5:15, 28:5). These circumstances lead us to conclude that the parable refers not to a domestic scene, but to a sacrificial one.

What do the three measures of meal represent? Some believe they refer to the three Noahic races. After the flood the people of the earth were divided into three races: Shemites, Japhethites, and Hamites. Others believe the three measures refer to the three great divisions of Christendom: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant. Since these parables are dealing with the development of the Kingdom of Heaven during the Church age, we would assume that the latter view was the correct one.

Next, what does the meal speak of? Meal is necessary for food and always has good implication. Fine flour was used in almost one-half of all the offerings of the temple, with leaven excluded (Lev. 2:1-6).

Meal was used by Elisha to counteract the poison in the pot (II Kings 4:39-41). When the sons of the prophets discovered that there was death in the pot, Elijah commanded that meal be brought and poured in; and the pottage was made edible.

Moreover, in the New Testament the Church of Jesus Christ

is spoken of as "one bread," which is emblematic of the Body of Christ, or the Church. Therefore, the interpretation that the meal represents the corrupt human heart and that the leaven which is introduced into it is the Gospel that purifies it is an error by all evidence.

The meal, therefore, represents the Body of Christ, but the meal's usefulness begins only when it is brought together with the oil and the water. The Holy Spirit, or the oil, is the means by which God brings His people into one. They are then one bread to be offered in sacrifice, even as Paul besought the Christians at Rome to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God (Rom 12:1).

But we notice that something foreign was introduced into the meal—the leaven. Since there is much misunderstanding on this subject, let us trace the use of leaven in the Scriptures. In the days of the Passover when the children of Israel came up out of Egypt they were to eat no leavened bread (Exod. 12:15, 19-20). This was also to be the custom in all the Passovers to come:

> "Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life" (Deut. 16:3).

The Passover typifies a certain experience of believers during this age. As Paul says, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:7, 8, 9).

Again we are told that leaven is strictly forbidden to be used in the temple or in the worship of the Lord (Exod. 23:18). Why these prohibitions? Because fermentation signified a process of corruption.

Leaven is used by Jesus in His teachings, always in a bad sense. Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6, 11-12). Here the leaven refers to the hyprocrisy and the doctrine of those sects. They were orthodox to the extreme, but their teaching was a pretense. The doctrine of the Sadducees was false. They were the rationalists of their day who denied the resurrection, the miraculous, or the existence of angels. There was also the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15). This was the leaven of cruelty and unbelief. Paul tells about the leaven

of malice (I Cor. 5:6-8). In Galatians we read of leaven's permeating the whole lump (Gal. 5:9). This was the attempt by the legalists to add law to grace. Any attempt to put the child of God under the law is legalism and was considered by Paul as the leavening of the Gospel.

Surely all this evidence must make it clear that the leaven of the parable is not something good, but evil. Leaven when it is introduced into meal sets up a fermentation, an upheaval, strife, agitation, rivalry. And it never ceases working until the fermentation is complete. Surely this is a true picture of the state of much of the Church at the present time. It was leaven which was found in the Corinthian Church, where there was a following after personalities, uncleanness, criticism, legal proceedings, fornication, covetousness, and misuses of the gifts. There were false apostles, false prophets and teachers. Paul, therefore, told them to purge out the old leaven, the old lump, that they might become a new lump.

There is today the leaven of false teaching revealed in a host of isms that are not in line with the Word of God.

There is the leaven of selfishness, the leaven of the works of the flesh, the leaven of worldliness creeping into the Church. Surely much of the Church has been permeated with the leaven of fermentation. That is what Christ saw come into His Church.

We have another matter to consider. Who was the woman who introduced the leaven into the meal? She was not a real woman, of course, but a symbol, as the meal, the vessel, and the leaven are symbols. There was only one woman that she could be. That is the woman of Revelation 17, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." This woman is commonly supposed to be the church of Rome, but this symbolic woman involves her and more. She is the apostate Christian church. She is represented in any religion that seeks to dominate and direct world powers. She is the spirit of Jezebel that got into the church at Thyatira and caused the people to commit spiritual fornication—union with the world:

> "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev. 2:20).

When the Church joined in with the world, the world introduced its doctrine and its works of the flesh. The introduction of leaven

into the Church was in the guise of a friendly act, but actually it was instigated by Satan through the agency of the woman. The Church sought ease from persecution, to share in the splendor of the world. Instead of the Church's converting the world, the world brought paganism into the Church.

Notice that the work of the woman was not an open work, but a stealthy one. She "hid" the leaven in the meal. It was a covert act, like the enemy who sowed the tares under the cover of night. So it is that those who bring evil into the Church do so slyly under the pretense that they are bringing in a benefit. Their evil practices are all glorified and made out to be a good thing. The worship of Mary, the veneration of relics, the selling of indulgences, and the countless other pious frauds that are practiced are all extolled, defended and made a good thing. But the Roman church is not the only one affected (and there are born-again people in that church). The lukewarm Laodicean spirit is affecting all churches to some degree—even those who claim to be among the ranks of the Full Gospel movement. The leaven of the world is doing its deadly work. The visible church as a whole will never be freed of this leaven. It is, therefore, preparing for judgment. To the Laodicean Church, Christ speaks solemn words:

> "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue theee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:15-18).

When Christ gave this solemn warning, He offered also an invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." It was a personal appeal. The leaven in Christendom will never be removed until Christ comes, but this does not apply to the individual or to the local church. To the local church Paul said, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened" (I Cor. 5:7).

There is a way to get rid of leaven and that is by fire. Christ said to the Laodicean Church, "Buy of me gold tried in the fire."

Although the parable does not develop this thought, God is trying His people by fire. This is a sign of the imminency of Christ's coming. The refiner will sit by the fire and purge the sons of Levi. And in the fires the leaven is purged out:

> "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:2-3).

Chapter 16

The Hidden Treasure

> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt. 13:44).

There are several interpretations of this parable which are inadequate to explain it. One affirms that the treasure is Christ and the field is the Gospel. But it may be observed that when the treasure was found it was hidden again. In what sense does the sinner find Christ and hide Him again? For when the sinner finds the Lord he is commanded to witness of Him to others. Another explanation makes the treasure to be salvation and the field the Bible. Notwithstanding, the Scriptures do not hide Christ, but rather reveal Him. And when salvation is found the person does not hide it again, as the man did the treasure when he had found it. Nor is the treasure the Scriptures. One does not have to sell all that he has to buy the Bible.

A third explanation is that the treasure is the Church, and the field is the world. But Christ did not find the Church and hide it again. Of the Church Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world; a city set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14). This is positive proof that since the Church cannot be hid it cannot be the hidden treasure.

To understand the parable we must stay by the rules of interpretation. In the first place, the parable is one that pertains to Israel and is found only in Matthew, a book written primarily to the Jews.

The field is not the Gospel; neither is it the Bible. The field, according to Christ in those parables He did explain, is the world —the world being the race of mankind generally—the social order of this age.

We are told that a certain man found the treasure. The man in

the other parables was the Son of Man, even Christ. In this case, the man found the treasure, hid it again, and sold all that he had that he might buy the field. Certainly this man is Christ. He came down from heaven, gave all that He had, impoverished Himself, so that He might redeem the world.

The question is, what is the treasure? There are some passages in the Old Testament which help us to make this identification—which we believe is the Kingdom of Israel. God spoke of Israel as His peculiar treasure.

> "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Ex. 19:5).
>
> "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure" (Psa. 135:4).

Why was Israel God's peculiar treasure? To understand this we must recall that God called Abraham for a specific purpose, that through him and his seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Israel was to grow, to become a great people; Israel would be surrounded by other nations, yet not be reckoned among the nations (Nu. 23:9).

Moses spoke of the peculiar place that Israel was to fill in God's purpose, in Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

> "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

Moreover, it was through this nation Israel that God brought forth Christ, the Redeemer, who would redeem the whole world.

Therefore, when Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is likened unto a treasure hid in a field, it means that Israel, and God's government through Israel was hidden in the world and awaited manifestation.

At one time Israel was the most powerful nation on earth. To this nation promises had been given. Israel was to have pre-emi-

nence over the earth. Jerusalem was to be the capital of the world, out of which would go forth the law (Isa. 2:1-4). But calamities and catastrophies came in succession. Ten of the tribes went into Assyrian captivity and never returned. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, had come back from Babylonian captivity, but they were a subject people and the glory had departed. The treasure, a symbol of the Messianic kingdom, was truly hidden in the earth. It was so deeply hidden that no one on earth outside the Jewish people had any idea of it.

Next we must take notice of the one who found the treasure. This, of course, was Christ. His purpose in coming into the world was to find it. And find it He did, and offered it to the nation saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Kingdom of Heaven is in the midst of us. It was ready to be revealed to the people of Israel, but alas, they knew not the day of their visitation.

Therefore, the treasure was replaced in the field. The one who found the treasure hid it again. Why was this done? When the Kingdom of Heaven was proclaimed Israel refused to hear the good tidings and repent. Instead, they requested signs to prove that the kingdom was really there. When the wicked rulers said, "We will not have this man to reign over us," the treasure of the kingdom was covered up again. It dared not remain uncovered long before the eyes of unbelief. A priceless treasure exposed to the eyes of enemies is insecure and must be removed to a place of safety.

As far as Jewry is concerned, the treasure has been covered for nearly 1900 years. With the lost ten tribes the time has been even longer—nearly 2500 years. Where are the lost ten tribes today to whom such great promises were given? There are several answers. Jesus came to earth in search of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And He found them, but they will remain covered to the eyes of the world until He whose right it is comes and reveals them (Ezek. 37:21-28). When Christ does that the treasure of the kingdom will come forth, and the rule of God on earth will be manifested to the world through His people Israel.

Christ came from His home in glory to find the lost treasure. After finding it, He sold all that He had to purchase the field in which it was hidden. By giving His life, He gave all; and through this act He redeemed the world. He not only bought the treasure, but He secured also the field wherein the treasure was hidden. Therefore, He has secured by redemption the whole world as well as the treasure of the kingdom. When the time comes He will not only assert His authority over Israel but over the whole earth.

These parables are spoken of as mysteries (Matt. 13:11). For nearly 2000 years the treasure of the Messianic kingdom has been so deeply hidden that many do not believe that it even exists. They suppose that when Christ returns His mission will not be to dig up the concealed treasure, but instead to burn up the field! This includes all those who deny the millennial reign of Christ and say that when Christ comes the earth will melt with fervent heat. Actually, this event occurs at the end of the thousand years' reign.

We may truly say that the Kingdom of God is on the earth now, but only in the hearts of Christ's followers. Even that is concealed from the world. It recognizes Christianity only as a religion. But the day is coming when the Kingdom of God will become visible. Through Israel and her Messiah, God will extend His rule throughout the earth. "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). Now is the time to preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Now is the time to tell people to prepare themselves, to make their ways straight.

We take the liberty to quote from the words of J. J. Ross in his *The Kingdom Mystery*:

> "This is truly a great mystery, but one that thrills the believing heart with joy and abounding delight. But this mystery has another aspect to it. It is the impoverishing of the finder. We expect that the one that has come upon the treasure, as this man did, will grow suddenly rich, emerging at once from the lowest depths of poverty to the vast possession of wealth and affluence. But the scene in the parable is quite the reverse. Instead of the finder of the treasure becoming rich by the wonderful discovery, He becomes poorer. He had possessions of great value before, but now He strips Himself of everything, and for a considerable period, becomes poorer than before. He buys on faith. The returning wealth of His purchase is not actual in the present, but prospective, sometime in the future.
>
> "This surely is a great mystery when it refers to Christ. But as we advance in our thought, the mystery becomes more and more profound. Had the finder of this treasure, and purchaser of the field, stayed in the field after the purchase, we might have looked for Him to bring the treasure of the kingdom to light at any moment. But in this case, after He had found the treasure, exposed it to view, and hid it away again, and knowing forever afterward the very spot where it lies, that He should take His departure from the field and remain for so long a time absent, is a mystery most profound.

Thus it is true, with our beloved Lord. He came to this earth, discovered and exposed the kingdom, hid it away in the midst of the world of human beings, bought the field at the cost of all He possessed, and then took His departure from it. He has left the field and has been absent from it now for a period of two thousand years. He is no longer an object of sight but of faith. His long absence from the field of the world gives occasion to many injurious thoughts and speeches about Him. His divine birth is denied, His Person is criticized, the truth of His literal resurrection is rejected, and His very existence, in some quarters, is disbelieved in. Men today, and many of them professed Christians, refuse to believe that Christ is the Man in the Glory. But though His long absence from the field is a fact, and the treasure of the kingdom lies hidden in the field, yet His true believing ones will still believe in and look for His return. Then pray, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' "

Chapter 17

A Merchantman Seeking Goodly Pearls

> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45-46).

There is a common explanation of this parable that considers the Lord Jesus Christ as the pearl of great price, and the Christian as the merchantman. But if the pearl of great price is the Saviour, then the other pearls must be saviours also. Neither sinners nor Christians are seeking saviours. Some claim that the merchantman was the Jew, but in this interpretation we have the same difficulty. No Jew is seeking many messiahs. And in what sense could either the Christian or the Jew sell all in order to buy Christ? We must look in a different direction from this view for the true explanation of the parable of the pearl of great price.

Let us consider the man in the parable. As we have seen, the man in the other parables was Christ. The merchantman is also Christ. We must notice that the parable states that "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls." It does not say like unto pearls.

The merchantman was not limited to one city, but he was a traveller who went about from country to country. He was a specialist engaged in a certain kind of business, that of seeking goodly pearls. So it is that during the past two thousand years the Lord has been seeking pearls—precious jewels for His crown. These are individuals, saved men and women. He is an expert in the business, able to distinguish between the genuine and the artificial. The Lord, who is the merchantman, "knoweth them that are his."

That He is seeking pearls means that He is searching with determination and discrimination. The Lord, even as He sought the lost sheep, is constantly in search for the unsaved to add them as

pearls to His crown.

One day the merchantman found a pearl that was of great price, its beauty and richness being above everything else. What is this pearl? It is none other than the Church! It is that great called-out company of all peoples, tongues, and nations who make up the true Temple of God.

The pearl is a peculiarly apt symbol of the Church in the way it is formed. It is not a mineral stone as are other gems. It is a product of life formed within the oyster. Something external comes within the oyster which wounds and irritates it. The oyster throws out a secretion, and so the pearl is built gradually by secretion, not mechanically, but vitally—which is a true type of the way the Church is formed. Christ was wounded in His purchase of the Church by His own blood. Then something of His own substance went into the Church as it grew. It literally has become "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."

The pearl comes from the sea, which is a type of nations, tongues and peoples (Rev. 15:4). So the Church is taken out of the world, members coming from every tribe and tongue and nation. While in the sea it is hidden, but the hour will come when the true Church will be made manifest and the whole world will see what a beautiful and glorious gem it is.

The pearl is secured through the oyster's death. When the oysters are brought to the surface, they are allowed to die a painful and lingering death. We are told that the shell must not be opened immediately, else the pearl would be marred. The oyster must first be permitted to die. So it is the death of Christ that gives glory and beauty to the Church.

That the pearl of great price is one, prefigures the unity of the Church. The merchantman found goodly pearls in times past, but then he sold all that he had that he might purchase this one. So the Church is one, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:12-13).

To secure this pearl Christ sold all that He had. Yea, He gave up the glory that He had with the Father before the world was. He surrendered His divine prerogatives and attributes and came to the earth, taking upon Himself the form of a servant. He gave up

all this that He might make the pearl of great price, the Church, His own. And thus did Christ say to the elders at Ephesus:

> "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

And so it is that Christ, the merchantman, during the Old Testament dispensation found many goodly pearls. But at length He came upon the pearl of great price. He made the purchase but at the cost of greatly impoverishing Himself. Yet, it is a pearl of exquisite value which in the end He will present to Himself a "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

Chapter 18

The Parable of the Net

> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just" (Matt. 13:47-49).

The *Parable of the Net* like the preceding parables refers to this dispensation. The net that is mentioned is the Gospel net. The parable is descriptive of the work of the disciples of the Lord. It will be remembered that when the Lord called them they were fishermen by profession, and were in fact mending their nets (Matt. 4:21). After an unsatisfactory night in which they caught nothing, they were told by the Lord to cast in their net, and when they did their net was so full that it was near to breaking. It was then that the Lord said to Peter, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10).

While it is true that men are often caught one by one, yet in this Gospel age during revivals and great spiritual visitations they are caught in large numbers. The parable is especially descriptive of the mass methods used in this dispensation to reach great numbers of people.

There is mention that the net was cast into the sea. The significance of the sea is made clear in other parables. The "pearl of great price" was taken from the sea. The sea represents peoples, tongues, and races. The Gospel was to be preached by Christ's disciples to all nations.

In Daniel 7:2-3 we see the Gentile empires rising from the sea of peoples. In Isaiah we have the picture of Gentile converts of Christianity rising as it were from the sea. "The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee" (Isa. 60:5).

Christ has returned to heaven. He is not represented as the fisherman, but "they"—His disciples—send out the Gospel net. The net itself speaks of the bounds of the Kingdom of Heaven. It does not include all the fishes of the sea, but only those within the sphere of Christian profession. Every kind of fish is drawn into the net, both good and bad. There are many varieties of the good fish bespeaking the many kinds of people of the various nations which accept Christianity, although their respective customs may be different.

We notice that there is no separation of the fish as long as they are in the net, which represents the sphere of profession in this age. Like the tares and wheat that remain to grow together, so the good and bad fishes mingle together in the net. Today as we look at the Church we see within it the good and bad, the sincere and those who are hypocrites, those who possess Christ and others who only profess. It would be a very difficult task indeed for men to separate the good from the bad. There would be many mistakes made. For only supernatural beings are qualified for such a task.

Yet there are many in the Kingdom of Heaven who are counterfeit Christians. They occupy space in the net, and some may wonder why God permits them to continue. But the process of gathering fish goes on until at last the net is filled. There is no thought that it will gather all the fish in the sea, which refutes the teaching that all will be saved or become even professing Christians. All within the net are not saved, let alone those outside the net. The Gospel in no case envisages the conversion of the whole world, as do those who suppose that the leaven of the *Parable of the Woman and the Three Measures of Meal* represents the Gospel leavening until the whole world is saved.

The work of the Church is not to accomplish the impossible task of converting the world, but rather the Church has the privilege of offering Christ as Saviour to all mankind, and "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

We come to the prophetic aspect of the parable. When the net was full it was drawn to shore, and the men sat down and gathered the good into vessels but cast the bad away. The Lord then explained this part of the parable by saying that the men represent the angels who will "sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Ordinarily it would be assumed that those who threw out the net would be the ones who drew it to shore and sorted out the

fishes. However, the parable does not take account of those who cast it out. But attention is rather directed to those who drew it in. The men who drew in the net and made the separation between the good and the bad fishes are the angels. This task is of such importance that it is reserved for supernatural beings.

The inference is that the angels have been present all the time, invisible guardians of the righteous. At the appointed hour they will come forth as executors to sever the righteous from the wicked. To pull in the net they must put forth an effort against the fishes swimming in the opposite direction. There is a certain resistance of any creature against being drawn from its natural element. From the nature of the events now taking place over the world, may we not be justified to believe that the angels are now beginning to tug at the net? J. J. Ross says of this, "Are we ready for it? Or will we be more anxious to remain in the sphere of the world than to hurry into the presence of Christ and be adapted for a new and heavenly sphere within the kingdom in manifestation?"

When is the net considered full? We must remember that the bad fishes are in it also. However, no account may be taken of them, for they are to be cast away. But the significant point is that the Gospel net will be full only when the complete number of the saved, or the elect, that are to form the Body of Christ are made up.

The bringing of the net to the shore means, "the end of the world." Or, more properly, "the end of the age." It will mark the end of this present dispensation. When the net is drawn up on the shore the time of grace for the Gentile nations will be ended.

That the angels separated the good fish from the bad and then threw the bad away into a furnace of fire rather than back into their natural element, signifies the meting out of their destiny.

It is interesting to note that after His resurrection, "Jesus stood on the shore," with food prepared for His disciples who had toiled all night and caught nothing. Jesus was on the shore, and He looked out upon the tired and weary disciples and commanded them to let down their net for a draught. They drew it in and there were "an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken" (John 21:11).

By application, this scene on the shore of the Sea of Galilee foreshadowed the arrival of the elect safe on heaven's shore. The number one hundred and fifty three is the number of the elect (9 x 17)—seventeen being also a number associated with the elect. The net was not broken, and not a fish was lost. The elect are now safe with Jesus on the eternal shore.

Chapter 19

The Parable of Unconscious Growth

> "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:26-29).

This parable which we find only in Mark apparently was spoken immediately after the *Parable of the Tares* and before that of *The Mustard Seed*. We have included it at this point, since it is not in the number recorded in Matthew. The Lord in relating the *Parable of the Sower* had fixed the attention of the disciples on the good seed growing to maturity and bringing forth fruit on good soil. Then to illustrate the growth of the seed in good soil He added three short parables, one of which was *The Lighted Candle,* another *The Mustard Seed,* and still another *The Good Seed in the Good Ground.*

This latter parable we now consider. The good ground of course is that class of hearers that receives the good seed and brings forth fruit. In both parables of the seed the latter is represented as the "word," "the word of God," "the word of the kingdom," and the "sons of the kingdom." In this parable the seed is again the Word of God.

Who is the sower? Not Christ personally, since it could hardly be said of Christ that "he knoweth not how . . . the earth bringeth forth." Nor would it appear that Christ should "sleep, and rise night and day." For "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Nevertheless, there is no difficulty in seeing Christ manifested in His disciples, sowing the Word. Neither will Christ do the reaping personally, but He will do it through His angels (Matt. 13:41). The man in the parable then is Christ by representation through His servants.

In the *Parable of the Sower* we were taught that the seed, the Word of God, must be planted in the good ground of an honest heart. Teaching and preaching the pure Word of God is casting the good seed into the ground.

After the sowing of the seed there must be complete confidence that the Word will do the work. The sower must rest his confidence in God and not be weighed down with after-anxiety. After he had sown, he slept and rose night and day and went about his business. He did not stand by and continually watch the ground where he had sown the seed, but he had implicit confidence in the seed. For after it is sown in the hearts of men there must be a work of the Spirit that no man can do.

The farmer watches the grain as it grows, but he knows not the method, nor cause, nor means of its growth. He does not have an intricate knowledge of the laws of nature that control the growth of the wheat. All he knows is that the grain continues to grow, changing the very face of his field, that in the course of time it will ripen to perfection. As there is a mystery of growth in the natural, so there is a mystery of growth in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Growth is spontaneous, but not instantaneous. It is "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." God generally does no work abruptly. There is a certain natural development to take place. It would work great mischief if the farmer would attempt to open the blade or to try to assist the forming of the ear. Likewise it requires time for the new convert to mature. Too much should not be expected of him at once.

The man who sowed the seed waited patiently for the harvest. In time the seed brought forth fruit; it ripened with the full perfect ear.

While the parable refers to the development of the individual, it also refers prophetically to the Kingdom of God as it involves the long period between the first sowing of the seed in the days of Christ, and His Second Coming. James speaks of the long patience of the husbandman:

> "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (James 5:7).

Cries have gone up from God's people to the husbandman to return to His field. There have been times when it seemed that

the little flock was about to perish, yet He has not come. To the human eye it seems as if the Lord has been sleeping and the Church has been left alone to surmount her obstacles. Yet the Kingdom of God has continued to develop; it has continued to grow through storm and sunshine. And so the harvest has been brought to maturity and the time of reaping is at hand. His disciples participate in that reaping, but in another sense Christ will reap the earth as was envisaged by John the Revelator:

> "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (Rev. 14:14-16).

Part 4:

Servants, Samaritans, Debtors and Kings

The Good Samaritan and Other Parables

The *Parable of the Good Samaritan* is the best known of the parables of Christ. It was spoken by the Lord in answer to the inquiry of a lawyer who had asked Him certain questions, one of which was, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus then related the beautiful parable of the Samaritan who rescued a man who had been wounded and robbed by thieves.

Included also in this group is that difficult *Parable of the Unfaithful Steward*. To some it is a matter of great surprise and perplexity that the Lord would illustrate a spiritual truth through the actions of a bad man—one who was glaringly dishonest. Yet when carefully examined the parable is found to teach a most important lesson. We are all stewards and at any time we may be called to account. The dishonest steward conceived a plan in which after he lost his stewardship he would make provision for the future.

The surprising part of the parable is that although the man had committed a gross act of unfaithfulness, his lord "commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." Why did he do this? The truth is that the unjust steward was wise only as far as this world is concerned and not for eternity. Jesus pointed out that the children of this world are wiser in their calculations and business dealings than Christians. The parable closes with a remarkable truth of how the children of God can receive a wonderful reception in paradise after they leave this life.

Chapter 20

The Unmerciful Servant

> "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt" (Matt. 18:23-27).

This parable teaches a most important principle of the Kingdom of Heaven—that if one desires forgiveness, he must forgive. Moreover, we perceive that Christ in teaching on this subject builds a solid foundation compatible with our own sense of justice.

It is sometimes taught that regardless of what men might do we are to accept their wrong-doing without complaint. That this is far from true is seen in Christ's words about discipline in the church which are recorded preceding this parable. If a brother offends there are four steps to take in dealing with the offending brother. If all attempts at reconciliation fail, then the individual is to be "unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Indeed the Lord implied that further action might be taken if the man's conduct is seriously injuring the cause of Christ. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). While this scripture has a wide application, we must not forget it was spoken in context with the subject of church discipline.

Nevertheless, in the matter of personal wrongs we should never attempt retaliation or revenge. Rather we are to turn the other cheek. Whatever the circumstances may be we are never for a moment to harbor bitterness; and the first moment the offender shows signs of penitence we should give him our full and unreserved

forgiveness. We too are under obligation to our Heavenly Father, who for Christ's sake has forgiven us. Therefore, if our brother has offended we are not to wait for him to come and apologize. Rather, it is our duty and obligation to go to him privately and talk the matter over. How many misunderstandings would be eliminated if we only followed the Master's instructions!

After Peter listened to the Lord's instructions as to how to deal properly with an offending brother, he said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). Peter no doubt believed he was quite generous in his suggestion that he forgive seven successive times. The Talmud said forgive only three times. But to Peter's surprise the Lord extended it an indefinite number of times, even seventy times seven. The fact was that Peter was in the dark about the whole nature of the Kingdom of Heaven and the necessity of willing forgiveness. So the ever-patient Lord proceeded to speak out a parable which explained the reason why a man who is unwilling to forgive cannot be a true citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The parable teaches that each member of the human race is in deep debt to God, and it portrays this in the story of a great king who would take account of his servants. One man was brought to him who owed the enormous sum of ten thousand talents. David and his princes prepared eight thousand talents for Solomon's temple (I Chronicles 29:4-7). According to Hebrew reckoning this was worth about ten million dollars of our money. Therefore, this servant owed about twelve million dollars. And in Jesus' time a fair day's wage was about twenty-five cents.

The question is how he came to be in debt to the king for so vast a sum. Evidently there was a mishandling of funds or some flagrant abuse of his stewardship. Jesus chose an extreme case because none other would properly illustrate the truth that he was teaching. Man is in debt to God in many ways. J. J. Ross in *The Kingdom Mystery* says in regard to this:

> "There are debts for time and talents wasted; debts for offenses committed; debts for duties neglected; debts for daily bread, health, friends, home, and for social peace and blessing, and also debts for gospel privileges. There are debts almost without number and variety that all owe to God."

It is to be noted that the man did not come of himself. He was apprehended for his misappropriation; he was "brought unto him." Apparently the debt had built up over the years as the man juggled accounts in an attempt to cover up his vast specula-

tions. Every effort on his part only resulted in enmeshing himself deeper and deeper in debt. Suddenly he was brought into the presence of the lord and he discovered that his master knew all about his manipulations. He had a perfect record of all that he owed him. Here, of course, is expressed a solemn truth of the Scriptures: God knows all about us. "But all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). Someday all of us will have to give account of all our deeds to God (Rom. 14:12).

In these days man's greatness is often eulogized; his scientific discoveries and intellectual attainments are lauded; and many talk about the greatness and even the divinity of man. But when man stands before God unprepared he is in a pitiable state indeed. This servant who owed twelve million dollars had "nothing to pay."

What should be done? According to Roman law wife and children were a part of a man's property. The lord of the embezzling servant ordered that he and his family—his wife and children—be sold into slavery. This meant that his family property would have been broken up and sold, so that payment could be made to recover his depredations. This is a true picture of the state of man. He is guilty before God, enormously in debt and deserves stern punishment.

With this fearful prospect before him and with nothing to pay, he was seized with fear and anguish. He was not so concerned over the crime he had committed, but in terror he realized the penalty he had to suffer for his deeds. He fell down at the feet of his lord and begged for mercy saying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all" (Matt. 18:26). There was insincerity here. How could he pay all? Absurdly impossible. Who could pay off twelve million dollars at the rate of twenty-five cents a day or even if he made a hundred times that? Frequently sinners have the erroneous idea that by doing a few good deeds they can pay off their enormous debt. Never!

But because of his extremity the king had compassion on him. The king who seemed so stern, heard his plea for mercy and suddenly mellowed and had compassion upon him and cancelled the enormous debt. Thus did the servant who a moment before had been a doomed man, find that he was pardoned and free of the whole debt. So we are made to understand something of the nature of God. Until the moment the man acknowledged his debt and sued for mercy, the Lord was severe and seemingly unrelenting. But the instant the man confessed his guilt and asked for mercy,

he was forgiving and compassionate. The situation may well be compared with that of Joseph and his brethren. Joseph seemed very harsh with his brethren, but the moment they came to repentance he lavished his love upon them. Because the man had asked for mercy his debt was cancelled.

Rescued from so fearful a fate, one can imagine how happy he should have been to bring the good news home to a despairing family. But if there was thankfulness it was of the hollow kind.

Gratitude for his lord's mercy should have caused him to be kind to his fellow men. But what did this man do? We are told that he went out from his presence and found a poor man who owed him about fifteen dollars. He quite forgot the punishment he had escaped because of the compassion of his lord and demanded that his fellow-servant pay him immediately:

> "But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt" (Matt. 18:28-30).

It has been well said that it is usually those who have forgotten their own transgressions who have the greatest tendency to be critical and harsh of others. This man was bad. He was possessed of an inexcusable selfishness. He cried for mercy when he was in trouble, but he had no pity for the troubles of another. He showed his debtor no mercy and had him cast into prison.

But the victim of his harshness was not without friends. They were moved with sorrow at what had happened to the poor man and they went out and told their lord. When the master heard this he was exceedingly angry and called the servant to him:

> "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:32-35).

The purpose of this parable is to show that unwillingness to forgive one's brother, even to the unlimited degree, shows a wicked and ungrateful spirit. If God has forgiven us of our great indebtedness, then we must be willing to forgive in return.

Chapter 21

The Unfaithful Steward

> "And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward" (Luke 16:1-2).

This parable is striking in that it uses the conduct of an unjust man to give instruction to good men. This is not the only parable of this nature. Another parable which illustrates a similar idea is that of the *Unjust Judge*. To some it is a matter of surprise and perplexity that the Lord would illustrate a spiritual truth through the actions of a bad man. At first thought it is difficult to understand how we could learn anything from the conduct of a person who is glaringly dishonest. Indeed, after reading about the plottings of this faithless servant we have a revulsion of feeling, and this revulsion is a natural consequence of studying the teachings of Christ Himself.

It is interesting to note that the parable follows immediately after the story of the Prodigal Son. The prodigal wasted his substance, while the unjust steward wasted his master's goods. When we read, "and he said also unto his disciples," it appears that there is some continuity between the two as if it were a continuance of the same discourse.

Jesus began the parable by speaking of a certain steward who was accused of wasting his master's goods. Stewardship represents the relation of all of us to God. We are stewards of our Lord's goods. Ownership does not rest with us; nevertheless, we have

opportunity to make use of our Lord's property with the implicit understanding that we use it in a way that will be to the Lord's interest.

The steward's lord did not maintain direct supervision of his affairs, but had committed to him custody of receipts and disbursements of expenditures. This circumstance in some way indicates the relation of the disciples to their Lord. As stewards, they hold in trust God's property. At any time they may be called into account, although years may pass before a demand for reckoning is made.

A crisis occurred in the story of this unfaithful steward. As a result of his wasteful practices he was threatened with the loss of his stewardship. An accusation had been made by someone in whom the Lord had confidence that his steward was wasting his goods. When the steward heard that he was to be taken to account he realized that his record would not bear investigation. He had nothing to answer, and by his own silence he acknowledged his guilt. It is not said that the man was wilfully dishonest. But his wastefulness would result in loss of the stewardship. The man was thus face to face with reality and his thoughts were occupied as to what he would do in the future.

> "Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses" (Luke 16:3-4).

The steward conceived a plan of what he would do, the disclosure of which reveals the worst features of the man's character. To attempt a defense was hopeless. He had not enough manhood to confess his guilt and show concern and grief over his conduct. The falseness of the man showed up in the fact that he carried on and held his head well. The essential badness of his heart became glaringly apparent. He was ready to commit an act of unscrupulous dishonesty.

The unjust steward would take care of himself well if he could have but a day or two more to lay his hand on his lord's treasures. Being himself dishonest, he hoped that he might find others who were dishonest and who would connive with him in a scheme conceived in self-interest. The man was bad, very bad. Still, like the devil whom he served, he had a great pride; he did not want to work; he feared poverty, and his pride prevented him from begging.

> "So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and

said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore" (Luke 16:5-7).

He went into action. The circumstances required haste. He called in his lord's debtors and explained a plan by which they would evade a share of their debts by dishonorable means. It was a scheme which involved moral fraud but not legal fraud. As steward of the lord's goods he had the right of attorney. His master had imposed confidence in him and had delegated him the legal right to handle his affairs. Since his master did not anticipate any such last minute move on his part, he had a few hours to execute his purpose. Calling in the lord's creditors one by one, he quickly unfolded his plan, no doubt keeping his own state of affairs secret. He called in each of the debtors apart and offered what they owed his lord at a huge discount. With a few rapid strokes of the pen he agreed to settle one account at half; and that the cases should not appear to be too nearly alike, another debt was settled at the rate of eighty for a hundred. So it went with the rest of the debtors. Thus at no cost to himself did he hope to make provision for the future. This fact he of course kept to himself. People who appear to offer something at an unusual bargain generally have some sly motive in the background which will operate to their considerable advantage.

Then comes the most surprising part of the parable. We are told that the lord, instead of being angry "commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." What is the explanation of this puzzling statement?

It would seem at first thought that Jesus had given a parable that is completely out of character with His other parables. Nevertheless, this is not so. As we proceed to examine carefully what follows we discover that the Lord is teaching us one of the most important truths of His Gospel.

Notice that the words *"unjust steward" are still used.* His last act of unfaithfulness had just been detected, and if he thought that through haste he could conceal his deed he was mistaken. For the lord's inquiries, which had proved to be more searching than had been anticipated, confirmed his suspicions of the total unsuitability of the man for stewardship.

The rich man, however, was a man of the world himself; and his displeasure at the discovery was overshadowed at the moment

by his admiration of the ingenuity of the scheme of the rogue, which had been so promptly executed. The steward was a clever scoundrel indeed. It is sad that his resourcefulness was not employed for nobler purposes. But at any rate, he had achieved his ends within the pale of the law.

Let us notice just what the rich man said, and the analogy that Jesus gave in His explanation. When he said that the steward had done "wisely," he meant it only in a worldly sense. Although it seemed that the steward had come to the end of his game, his sharp wit had made such good use of the remaining hours of the tenure of his stewardship that he had put all his lord's debtors under obligation to him. Had the steward stolen the money outright from the lord, it could have been taken from him and he himself sent to prison. But exercising in his final hours as steward the authority that had been entrusted to him, he had given legal receipts to the debtors that would stand up in a court of law.

But in what way could the man's act be commended? Not from the standpoint of eternal things, certainly. In this same chapter Jesus portrayed the doom of those who hold riches of this world and use them as unjust stewards. The rich man dressed in purple and fine linen dined sumptuously every day while the poor beggar starved at his door. But the hour of reckoning came. Death stripped him of all, and he opened his eyes in hades where there was nothing to refresh or comfort him. From that standpoint the unjust steward was seven kinds of a fool. His wisdom was the wisdom of those who consider this life everything and who give no thought to the life to come. Alas, there are millions of people who fit this very description. And Jesus made it plain that his wisdom was only the wisdom of a man who considers life in this world the sole object of his interest. Therefore, Jesus said, "For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8).

What did Jesus mean by this saying that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light? He simply meant that they are wiser *as far as this generation is concerned.* They handle their affairs on the average more skillfully than believers. Of course, they are wise only from the standpoint of their generation or their lifetime. As for their gross disregard of their lot in eternity, their folly is infinite. Jesus said the worldly rich are fools (Luke 12:20). As the rich man we have mentioned, they are wise in temporal things but utterly insane in their regard for eternal things.

Still Jesus would have His people wise not only in the things

of the world to come, but wise enough for both worlds. Naturally this does not mean that they would act as the *unjust steward,* for then they would no longer be children of light. But what Jesus meant was that Christians should conduct their affairs with prudence and in such a way in this world as to lay up a store of treasure in the world to come.

The children of this world labor night and day to accumulate treasure for this world which is swept from them in a moment of time so that they become beggars for eternity. Yet Christians who accumulate this world's mammon honestly and who believe that time means little and eternity everything, are often lackadaisical and negligent to put it to work winning souls. Professing Christians as a whole, we are told, put less than one percent of their incomes into the work of evangelizing the heathen. Yet if they did, they would through their means be transferring their earthly possessions into untold heavenly riches. Yea, there would be many who would be waiting to greet them in glory.

The children of this world understand the temporal value of material substance, and as Esau they take it for more than its real worth. To the invisible spiritual things they attach little or no value. The children of this world are then by implication children of darkness. The children of light consider the time beyond the hereafter more important and eternal. As has been said, "The men of this world are quicker and more penetrating in their reckoning of personal interest within their single sphere than are the children of light in reckoning their interests, as included within both present and future."

Christians as a whole, therefore, overlook too readily the bearing that material things have upon their future life. They fall into the mistake of regarding things of this time as having little or no connection with those of the life to come. They overlook the fact that the provident handling of their material goods has a direct relation to rewards in future life. Because of this neglect they use the things of this world as if they had no relation to the world to come. In this "the children of this world are wiser in their generation." To correct this great error, Jesus then made one of the most remarkable and interesting statements concerning the after life:

> "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

Here we come to the very heart of the lesson taught by the

parable. Thus far our attention has been directed to the dishonesty and selfishness that we find in the world. Jesus spoke of something just the opposite. Christians too are stewards of the mammon of unrighteousness. While the world uses it in selfish schemes and for selfish purposes, the Christian has an opportunity of using it for a much nobler purpose. We can use our money in the glorious work of winning souls. Instead of hoarding our earnings to leave behind when we die, we can actually make them the means of blessing people for time and eternity. Think of it: by means of the unrighteous mammon we can establish an eternal relationship with people whom we do not know now, but who will cherish our friendship throughout eternity!

Obviously our giving to the cause of Christ is carefully recorded in the books of God. Over the years these people who come to the Lord because we cared for souls will one by one depart this earth. There will come the hour when their benefactor goes to join them. Apparently these people in "the eternal habitations" will be alerted and they shall gather in great company to welcome that person into their abode. In that region of the blessed the happy pilgrim will find that his sacrifice has gone to lay the foundation for streams of friendship which will endure for eternity. By the wise use of our means and the careful guarding of our stewardship, we can greatly multiply and strengthen the ties of fellowship in the world to come. This then is what Christ would teach us: that we through the wise use of our material means make friendships of eternal duration for the world to come.

> "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" **(Luke 16:10-11)**

In the parable, the Unjust Steward was said to have acted wisely from the standpoint of the world. By his underhanded methods he did well by himself. But as far as eternal matters were concerned, the latter part of Luke 16 describes his final fate. Appropriately Jesus concluded His remarks by asking the solemn question, "And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:12). The unfaithful steward did well by himself in this world; he did badly indeed for the world to come.

Chapter 22

The Good Samaritan

> "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:25-27).

This parable of the Good Samaritan was spoken by Jesus in answer to the question by a lawyer who said, "Who is my neighbour?" This question was subsequent to a previous question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). The Lord had answered by putting another question to him in return, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" When the lawyer replied that the Law said to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself, Jesus said, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live."

The lawyer had made the inquiry probably as a lead question and not for the purpose of receiving instruction. He probably thought it was a good way to open an interesting religious discussion. But the Lord's answer, so simple and practical, did not lend itself to a discussion. He said in effect that the standard the lawyer had set for himself was a true one; all he had to do was to live up to it.

The questioner was not willing to let the matter rest there. He apparently felt that he was able to love God with all of his heart, but the question arose in his mind as to who was his neighbor. He did not wish to waste his time loving unworthy objects. He was willing to love but not above the Law's requirements. He apparently had his heart so completely under control that he could love anyone the Law commanded him to love, but none else. So the question with him was, what person was he under obligation to love and which ones might he leave out, unloved—perhaps to hate?

How was Jesus to deal with this lawyer who thought he understood the Law but was troubled only by intellectual perplexities as the question, "Who is my neighbor?" For Jesus to answer him properly it was necessary that He go deeper than the mere discussion of the limits of the range of neighborship. The lawyer thought he had an intellectual perplexity, but really it was a moral one. The man obviously did not need to learn who his neighbor was, *but what was the neighborly spirit?*

Instead of answering him, with extraordinary insight the Lord appealed directly to his heart by telling the story of the Good Samaritan. It will be seen that every detail of this exquisite picture of human warmth and kindness is in contrast to the chilling legalism of the lawyer. As Maturin says in his *Practical Studies of the Parables,* "With one master stroke our Lord draws the contrast between men such as his questioner and such a spirit as he displayed, and this fresh and vigorous Samaritan."

The picture drawn in the parable is an impressive one. A man has been stripped of his clothing, robbed, and then left seriously injured by the wayside in a half-dying condition. Those who robbed him knew what they wanted and got it; that they nearly killed him was incidental, a mere by-product of their activities. Having got what they wanted, they had no further interest in their victim and off they went. They had created a problem; as far as they were concerned anyone who cared to solve it might. They cared not that the morning sun would rise on a countenance perhaps stiff in death.

The road on which the man was set led down to the city of Jericho. Because travelers going to that city had to pass this way it had become a favorite resort for bandits to lie in ambush. On this particular morning after the attack a figure could be dimly traced approaching in the distance. It was a priest who by chance was passing that way. He saw the man lying there with his wounds still fresh. He was a man who had been ordained to minister the altar, and by order of his office he was trained to love God and his neighbor. At first it would seem fortunate that such a person would be the first to arrive. But as it turns out, nothing less favorable could have happened. He passed by without even ascertaining the condition of the victim. The priest was not in the same class as the robbers, who in their violence nearly killed; yet he was content to *let* the man die.

The priest passed on, and after a while another figure came

into view—a Levite. He was not a priest, but a subordinate officer of the temple. The Levite did not do exactly as the priest. When he saw the man he took time to pause and ascertain his condition. At first sight it appeared that this man was better than the priest, who had merely glanced at the prostrate man and who did not even slacken his pace. But no, the Levite's conduct was even worse; for having paused to learn the victim's sad condition, he too passed on with no concern for his anguish or the fact that if no one had compassion on him he would certainly die. Perhaps for a moment conscience told him what he ought to do, but when he calculated how much time and trouble he would put out he banished such thoughts and went on his way.

Now every man who makes a pretense at religion seeks to rationalize his conduct. What could these two men say to themselves that would appease their consciences and ease their comfortable feelings as they left the man behind to die?

They could reason that the man was a fool to travel on such a dangerous road with his money bags. Perhaps the robbers were waiting in the vicinity even yet. Why should they linger and risk their lives at this lonely point on the highway because he chose to be a fool and had not taken the proper precautions to protect the valuables he was carrying. It was an open invitation to robbery.

And then there was something else that they had to be careful about. This minor matter suddenly became very important to them. They had to beware lest if the man be dead or dying, they be defiled. This would cause interference with their activities at the temple. And so as they thought over these things, each felt satisfied that his decision had been altogether a prudent one.

Fortunately for the injured man another figure appeared in the distance, and as he drew near he saw the wounded man and stopped to investigate what had happened.

> "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee" **(Luke 10:33-35).**

Here we see another man enter into the picture whose rule of conduct soon appears to be of quite a different order. Yet he is a Samaritan. A Samaritan was a man far removed from the temple ceremonies. He was of a race that ordinarily had no dealings with the Jews. Yet he believed in God and worshiped Him. Immediately when he saw the stricken man, he took no account of whether or not he was a Jew but he bent down and examined his injuries. With his oil and wine he anointed the wounds and bound them up. Then having eased the unfortunate man's pain, he lifted him up, placed him on his own beast and took him to the nearest inn. There he saw to it that the accommodations of the inn were requisitioned to the man's aid.

On the morrow as business was awaiting him, he had to go on his way; but before he left he gave his host payment for what longer attendance on the man might be required, and if more were needed he promised to pay it when he passed that way again. He did not expect his host to do as he had done, taking on the responsibility for care of the injured one, but made himself liable for it.

After Jesus had completed narrating the story He turned to the lawyer and said, "Which now of these three thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" The answer was obvious. "He that shewed mercy on him." And with the reply was the tacit acknowledgement that his question had been answered. There remained only the practical application of Christ's teaching, and so He said to the lawyer, "Go, and do thou likewise."

The lawyer had begun the discussion with some complacency, and was able to give an answer to the Lord's first question which even the Master commended. But after the parable was spoken his complacency probably had vanished. The question of who one's neighbor is was unmistakably answered in the lone circumstance of nearness or neighborhood. There is much suffering and misery in this world but most of it is far beyond our reach. We are neither omnipresent nor omnipotent; yet we are always present somewhere, and in that circle lies our neighbor and our duty. As Henry Calderwood sums up the matter of who is our neighbor, "In substance, it is this, love another as thyself, and the neighborhood or the nearness is that which determines who the object of regard should be."

Chapter 23

The Tower and the King Making War

> "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28-30).

The Parable of the Great Supper taught us that when men have accepted the invitation to the Gospel feast it is well that they do not get so absorbed in the occupations and ambitions of life that they forget their obligation. The *Parable of the Tower* carries the thought even further, that when one hears the invitation he should sit down and count the cost; he should ask himself whether he is prepared to pay the price.

As Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount He gave the similes of the two houses: the house built on the rock, and the house built on sand. The Lord showed that only the house built on a rock foundation could stand the storm (Matt. 7:24-28). The foundation, He declared, was His words and His sayings. He that heard His sayings and obeyed them was building his house upon the rock. He that heard His sayings and did them not was building on sand. He showed that the hour would come when the rain would descend and the floods would overflow; and if the house was built upon sand it would fall and the fall thereof would be great.

Therefore, it was all important that every man should build his house upon the rock. For sooner or later the summertime would ebb and the storms of life would come and overflow and would destroy the house that was not built on a rock foundation.

But in the Parable of the Tower we see that a solid foundation is not enough. One must sit down and make certain calculations. He should make sure he has enough money to complete the

building. For if he lays the foundation and then has to stop, he will become the laughing stock of all who pass by.

Similarly, if a king finds that the enemy's forces outnumber his two to one, it will probably be wiser to make a treaty with that king than to attempt battle.

> "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke 14:31-32).

Thus Jesus warned against the danger of short-lived enthusiasm. Men must count the cost. They must be ready for any sacrifice.

One should be careful, however, in the inferences made from this parable. It cannot mean that unless we feel strong enough to go through a life of hardship we should not make the decision to be a Christian. By God's grace we can stand, and no temptation shall overtake us but that God will with the temptation make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it (I Cor. 10:13).

Nevertheless, the Lord teaches that discipleship is serious business; indeed it is costly business. Jesus said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

Chapter 24

The Two Debtors

> "And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged" (Luke 7:40-43).

By itself the *Parable of the Two Debtors* would be intelligible and a beautiful story, but with the background of the dinner in Simon's house it delivers a powerful object lesson.

In another chapter we have discussed this story of the sinful woman who came into Simon's house while he was entertaining Christ. This Pharisee evidently was not a believer in the Lord, for he did not acknowledge him as a prophet (Verse 39). Apparently he had invited Jesus to dinner more as a matter of curiosity.

A sinful woman had slipped into the house and had fallen down before Jesus and began to wash His feet with her tears, wiping them with the hair of her head and anointing them with ointment. There is reason to believe that she had come under deep conviction as the result of hearing a previous discourse of Christ's and had sorrowed for her sins. Once she had opportunity to come into the presence of Christ her sorrow broke out afresh.

Simon, the Pharisee watched the scene with cynicism and undisguised amazement:

> "He spake, within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39).

To him the woman was a moral leper, an "untouchable." And

he considered it a great offense that Jesus permitted her to touch Him.

The Lord of course read the thoughts of Simon and noted that he had been offended. And to answer him He gave the *Parable of the Two Debtors.* Both were insolvent, but one owed ten times as much as the other. Since neither could pay, the lord freely forgave them both and did not invoke the penalty of the Law against them.

Let us note the peculiar circumstances of the parable. Some debtors who are insolvent, instead of being grateful for any favors, are actually spiteful to their creditors that lose by them, and they cannot give them any good word.

The fact is that sin is a debt and all sinners are debtors to the Lord God, a debt enlarged by disobedience and our wasting of the Lord's goods. Some persons, however, are deeper in debt than others. In the case that Jesus mentioned one owed only 50 pence and the other 500. But since neither had the wherewith to pay, the creditor freely forgave them both. And herein is the blessed truth that if we repent God is ready to forgive freely those in debt to Him.

Now it will be seen from this that those who have their sins pardoned are under great obligation to love God. And the more that is forgiven, the greater the love should be. Christ, therefore, applied the case to the Pharisee and to the woman. Since Simon had been forgiven much less than the sinner woman, he loved less. The woman had been forgiven much and loved much. And Jesus drew the comparison.

Simon had not so much as ordered water to wash His feet, but the woman had done much more. "She hath washed my feet with tears," and had "wiped them with the hairs of her head" in token of her great love. Simon had not kissed His cheek, but "this woman . . . . hath not ceased to kiss my feet." The Pharisee had not provided a little oil to anoint the Lord's head, but this woman bestowed a box of precious ointment upon Him. Jesus summed up the matter saying, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47).

In effect, the parable had been a comparison between Simon and the outcast. One can imagine the surprise of the Pharisee when he found himself placed in the same category as the woman of the city, and the still greater surprise when he saw the comparison was to his disadvantage.

Jesus had accurately analyzed Simon's character. Since he had neglected the hospitable and kindly customs with which an honored guest was received, the obvious inference was that Simon had invited him out of mere curiosity. Completely satisfied with himself, the visit of Jesus had brought him no joy, no answer to life's questions, no fulfillment of any longing.

Religious people in church are apt to pray in a more or less casual way for sinners, pass on to the rest of the service, and then depart to their business with little gratitude to God. Many would have to confess that in this matter they are nearer the position of Simon than that of the woman. We divide sins into the big and little, with our own sins the little ones. None of us likes to be compared with the Pharisee of our Lord's time, but in the fact of our complacency and utter unconsciousness that there is anything amiss with ourselves, most of us might have taken Simon's place and sat there for the picture Jesus drew.

Part 5:

Israel and the Gentiles

Parables of Israel and the Gentiles

One of these parables — *The Laborers of the Vineyard* — has been considered extremely difficult to understand. A superficial reading of it might give the impression that it is out of character with the other teachings of Jesus, as if the householder, the leading character of the parable, was a man intent in producing poor labor relations. But the purpose of the parable has another objective altogether. When the proper key is found, we perceive that the parable contains one of the most valuable lessons of the Gospel.

Included in this part are the *Parables of the Great Supper* and *The Royal Wedding*. In some respects these two parables resemble one another, yet they are clearly distinct. They were in fact given at two different periods in the Lord's ministry. The first one portrays God's displeasure when Jewry turned down the invitation to the great gospel supper. The *Parable of the Royal Wedding* brings out a number of other truths, one of which forecast the coming destruction of Jerusalem. The problem of the guest who failed to have on the wedding garment, a matter that puzzled many, is explained.

The *Parable of the Wicked Husbandman* portrayed the approaching death of Christ and God's turning from Israel to the Gentiles. Other aspects of the same subject are brought out in the *Parable of the Barren Fig Tree*.

Chapter 25

The Patched Garment

> "And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old" (Luke 5:36).

This is a parable that is repeated three times in the Gospels. In Luke we are told that a new piece is taken out of a whole garment and put on an old one. There are therefore two results. Both the new garment and the old one are ruined. The new because a piece has been removed from it, and the old because it is disfigured by a different kind of cloth. Matthew and Mark add that the new patch being stronger than the old, taketh away part of the old and the rent is made worse.

The parable follows a discussion on the subject of fasting. Jesus was asked, "Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?" (Verse 33).

Jesus indicated in His reply that He had not come to patch up Judaism with certain reformations but to substitute a new garment altogether. John was a reformer, a good man and a great, but all he could do was put one more patch on Judaism; and Jesus inferred that even the principle of fasting would be different when His disciples were clad with the new garment of grace. They, therefore, must wait for the new life of the Spirit before they could take up its outward forms.

Judaism in Jesus' day was an old institution that was decaying and waxing old and ready to pass away. To mix the new with the old would be to spoil both. No man could judge Christianity by the piece cut off from it, and the piece could never harmonize with the old—the rent would only be made worse. A piece from the Gospel of grace could not help the old threadbare Law, the worn-out garment of Judaism.

Therefore, Christ was showing that He would not have fragments of His teaching fastened onto other religious systems. He did not come to patch up worn-out systems of religion; He came to bring the message of regeneration.

In this parable lies the explanation of a fact that often puzzles Christians. It is not an uncommon thing to find professors of religion whose lives are totally inconsistent. At one time they seem devout, earnest and sincere; at other times they are superficial, irreligious and even bad. We seek to reconcile their two moods, to rationalize their actions, but have great difficulty in doing so. It seems that there are two kinds of fruit growing on the same tree. Are these people mere hyprocrites? Do we not have the answer in this parable? They have put a patch of religion on their old, unsanctified nature.

These people at some crisis in their lives have felt their need of God and religion and to a limited extent it has influenced their lives, but not enough to change their hearts. Their old inclinations and outlook still remain, with another view added. The taste for the old sins is still there, although on the surface they may be given up. Their old nature has not been truly penetrated by the grace of God. The transforming power of Christ has not acted to change the evil springs of their being. They have merely had a patch of religion placed over their unconverted nature.

Consequently, we witness a dual operation going on in their lives. The religious comes to the surface; and then again the real self comes forth. The spiritual wrestles with the old evil nature, striving to gain the mastery. But neither is able to influence the other. Like the patch that agreeth not with the old, there is no organic connection between the two. The religious has no power to penetrate and change the unhallowed nature of the old, but is merely attached to it.

Those who look upon this unedifying spectacle of a patched profession of religion are confused and wonder if this can be Christianity. But all they have seen is a religious patch that is being used to cover an old unsanctified life. They see that "the new piece . . . taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse." The more they study such an individual the more they see the widening breach between their religion and their practice. The rent continually gets worse and the naked unsanctified nature shows forth from underneath.

There is something else. As has often been pointed out, certain

people use the cloak of religion to cover up some threadbare part of their character, something which may be so degrading that they really want a remedy for it. They look for a nostrum that will cure this one particular sin, but they do not desire a change in their whole character. As has been said, "It may be better for us to feel the full power of some sin or some evil habit that we cannot get rid of for years, than to be able to gain the victory over it and feel no further need of God."

Thus we see that some people seek to put a patch of religion over tattered portions of their character, some especially mean part of their disposition. They want religion to cover that particular gaping rent in their character, and they think there is nothing they would not do to get rid of that obnoxious and troublesome fault, but they do not want a whole new garment of grace. Their attention is so concentrated on this rent that they are unaware that their whole garment is shabby and threadbare, and that their whole nature is unholy and earthly.

Such persons find sooner or later that no nostrum can cure their disease. Their sin becomes more deeply rooted than ever. If God answered their prayer and gave them deliverance from this one thing only, it would be the worst thing that could happen to them. But as their sense of need increases, they are driven in desperation to the point where they cry out to God for complete renewal. They want more than a patch; they desire a whole new garment.

Our faith must not be a patchwork of pieces cut from this and that. Rather our garment of grace must be woven without seam from top to bottom. The whole pattern must be balanced, containing the many truths of Christianity in perfect blending one with another, forming a harmonious whole.

Today there is a great struggle going on in Christendom. Some wish to leave out divine healing or the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the gifts of the Spirit. But the pattern is not complete without these, and if otherwise there is a rent in the garment. Some take certain doctrines and exaggerate these until they are completely out of proportion to their place, and in so doing they disfigure the pattern. All they have is a patched-up system of Christianity.

No doubt there are many cases in which men looking on these miserable patchwork systems revolt against Christianity because they see the disfiguring rent, and reason will not accept what seems so inconsistent. Alas, what they see is not Christianity

but a patchwork of isolated dogma. On the other hand, the garment of grace is perfectly designed. It is a robe of righteousness which beautifies every faculty of man's nature and stands in sharp contrast to the method of concealing defects by clumsy patchwork.

Chapter 26

The Laborers in the Vineyard

At the first reading this parable seems difficult; yet when carefully examined, we find it teaches one of the most important lessons in the Scriptures. To understand it properly we must take note of the context. The rich young ruler has come to Jesus and asked the question, "Good master, what shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" His imagination was fired by the thought that by doing some heroic deed he might win the coveted reward of eternal life. When the Lord referred the common test, that he keep the commandments, the answer seemed to him as too commonplace, not meeting the requirements of a lofty spirit.

But Jesus was drawing the young man out. He had him in a position to test his capacity for great deeds by telling him to "go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." The young man failed the test and showed how far apart ambition to do some great thing and full devotion to God can be. We are told "he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." This caused Christ to remark that a rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples were amazed, and Peter, who had the habit of thinking out loud said, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

In these words of Peter may be found the key to the parable which follows. The desire for possession and reward are not altogether evil. For the original command to man was, "Let them have dominion . . . over all the earth." But fallen human nature has made the thought of compensation, reward, and ownership the chief objects of life. There was danger of Peter and the other disciples being impelled by this mercenary motive.

But Christ, in answering Peter, showed him that in time he would enjoy a full reward. But he was not to make it a matter of calculation, else he might fall into the same error of the rich

young ruler who valued his possessions more than receiving eternal life.

Jesus told Peter that in the age to come those who had followed Him should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. He went farther than that and showed that every disciple who followed Him by forsaking all should not only receive in the world to come eternal life, but a hundred-fold in this time in houses and lands.

> "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

But there is a subtle condition. The promise here is only for those who had left all for Christ's sake—something that very few are willing to do. We are not authorized to tell people that if they make a sacrifice, that by cold calculation they are going to receive so much in return. The sacrifice must be wholehearted, and the payment must seem sufficient in the joy of working in the Master's vineyard. That there will come a reward, an abundant reward in this life is but incidental. Though men consider a reward not the all-important attraction, in the sight of God it is of such short duration and so insignificant to that which is to come that it is scarcely worthy of comparison.

The thought of earthly reward, however, seemed very important to the disciples. They looked for an imminent manifestation of the Messianic kingdom in their time, and this misconception on their part was never fully clarified until after Christ's resurrecton. It was this misunderstanding on the part of Judas which was the main contributing factor to his terrible act of betrayal.

And indeed Salome, the ambitious mother of James and John, was even then on the way to plead the cause of her sons that they might sit one on the right hand and the other on the left in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-21). This ill-advised act on her part occasioned the deep indignation of the other ten disciples (Verse 24).

It was with these things in mind that Jesus spoke the *Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.* And only in careful consideration of these details is it possible to understand its meaning.

A superficial reading of the parable might give the impression that the householder was a man whose actions were calculated to produce poor labor relations. It would seem a foolish thing to pay some laborers at the rate of twelve times as much as certain others. But the lesson of the parable is lost altogether if it is to be considered as a portrayal of strategy in keeping labor hands satisfied. Indeed, as we shall see, some of the workers hired by the householder became very unhappy and discontented. But the parable has another objective altogether. It teaches the follower of Christ a spiritual truth that has no place whatever in the competitive rivalries of human commerce. Indeed it was Christ's intention to show that the motives that generally guided man in the business world had no place in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus answered Peter's question, "What shall we have?" He added a significant word, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." This peculiar statement called for explanation, and Jesus gave it in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard:

> "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard" (Matt. 20:1-2).

The parable concerns a householder who had a large vineyard and was seeking laborers to work in it. There is no doubt that the householder refers to God, who needs workers for His vineyard. The householder rose early in the morning and went to the market place to secure help. In this we see that God is dependent on the instrumentality of His servants and upon human assistance to fulfill His purposes.

Arriving at the market place the householder soon found a band of workers who were eager to work. They were ambitious workmen, and when the householder informed them that he was in the market for workers they showed immediate interest. They knew the householder was a man of honor and their money was sure. Nevertheless, they were not going to work until they had an understanding. They bargained with the householder, who did not protest against their bargaining but was willing to give them what they wanted—a penny, or denarius, for the day's work, which was considered a liberal wage for that time.

The interpretation of the parable depends on a clear under-

standing of this bargain made with these first workers. Some expositors have resorted to the theory that those workers were less diligent than the later ones. But there is nothing said to indicate this. These men were representatives of a class who wish to get ahead in the world. They are willing to put their talents to work in service for Christ, but they must be assured that they will be properly compensated. To them, working in Christ's vineyard is a business proposition. Paul makes an illuminating comment on this point:

> "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel" (I Cor. 9:17-18).

Paul felt that the privilege of working in God's vineyard was so great that he dared not charge for it. He had to do it willingly and leave the matter of pay up to the One who called him. Not that those who preach the Gospel are not to live off the Gospel, for the apostle makes it clear in the context (I Cor. 9:7-15). The minister has the right to hope and expect that his own needs will be supplied. Still the amount of pay or salary should not be the determining factor in his decision. When the Master calls him to work in His vineyard the preacher must be willing to go at all costs.

The householder noted the calculated business approach of the early morning laborers. They wanted a certain amount and he agreed to what they asked. It was entirely a business proposition. As Paul noted, a "dispensation," a bargain, was agreed upon. They should not have expected more.

We fear that in this present day many young ministers are sidetracked over the question of salary in their preaching of the Gospel. They must have so much before they will accept a call. If they would only lay the bargaining aside and consider that the privilege of preaching the Gospel is in itself a great reward, they would in the end receive more, and they would never succumb to the temptation to be mere hirelings, but would become true ministers of the Gospel. In addition, their reward will be great in the world to come.

> "And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, I will give

you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise" (Matt. 20:3-5).

The householder, realizing the need of the laborers in his vineyard was pressing, went again to the marketplace at nine o'clock, at noon, and at three o'clock. Each time he enlisted a new crew of workers; yet he was still short-handed, for the harvest was very great. Seeing that despite all the laborers he had secured he was still in need of more, he went out again at the eleventh hour (five o'clock) and found that there were still other workers idle. Therefore, he hired them also:

> "And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive" (Matt. 20:6-7).

These last workers were long delayed in entering the service because they had received no direct call. Apparently the Lord acknowledged absence of responsibility on their part. These men had not known until the day was far advanced that the Lord required their service. The uniform test of whether or not one is in the divine will is readiness to respond to the call when it reaches him.

We now come to the crucial point of the parable. Those who were called late in the day did not require an explicit statement as to the amount of wages. There is the great truth. These last laborers believed that the Lord of the harvest was to be trusted for bestowing what was just. In this case there was no calculating spirit so characteristic of those first laborers who bargained for the penny. They required no definite pledge but were willing to trust in the generosity of the householder. "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive" (Verse 7).

Evening came, and with it the reckoning. Each man came to receive his pay, and the householder beginning from the last to the first gave each one a penny.

> "So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured

against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:8-16).

Even those who had worked for only one hour received a penny. Under the agreement they might have received much less. But the householder was generous; he gave them the wages as if they had worked all day. These laborers departed with joy, telling others as they went that they had received a full day's pay.

The day closed in discontent. The early morning laborers who also received a penny murmured about what they had received. They had been satisfied until they had seen the late laborers paid a full day's wage. But when they saw this, "they supposed that they should have received more." But their expectation was not fulfilled. The householder stayed strictly by his agreement, paid them their penny and did not apparently give them any explanation for acting as he had.

The only hint given previously in the parable for the householder's generosity is found in the words, "No man hath hired us," indicating that their lack of employment was no fault of theirs. It had been a trial to them and a cause of sadness. There was the prospect of disappointment when they went home to tell their families that they had earned nothing during the whole day. The owner saw the sorrow of their hearts and this accounts for his generosity. He had a tender regard for those who were willing to work, but who were placed at a disadvantage by circumstances so that they had no work.

Those who are busiest in God's vineyard need this warning the most. They are hard workers, and they enjoy their success. They may look with disdain at their more humble brethren. Complacent in their winning the competitive race, they are eagerly calculating their rewards in God's service. There is real danger in these comparisons and they do not come from love for Christ.

Christ wants us to do our work and leave the rest to Him. Shall not the Lord of the whole earth do right? Rivalries and quarrelings among fellow-workers in the Lord's vineyard betray sin-

fulness and carnality. That was what the Lord was trying to tell Peter when he asked, "What shall we have therefore?" He wanted them to understand that however faithful they had been in service, they were to consider themselves as unprofitable servants, and that the rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven were of grace and not of merit. He did not want Peter and his companions to be of the bargaining kind.

So it was that when the early morning laborers saw how much the eleventh hour workers received, they were greatly dissatisfied. They began to tell how much they had suffered, how they had borne the heat of the day. They felt that they were being treated unjustly. Envy had taken hold of them. Jealousy cursed Cain, the first murderer and caused him to slay his brother. Envy caused the vengeful spirit of Saul to pursue David and to plot for years to kill him. It was envy that crucified Christ.

The householder answered the complaint by speaking to one of the laborers who happened to be standing near. He said to him, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny?" They had bargained with the householder and he had given them what they wanted. They had to have a pledge, and they had received it. The householder ended the conversation with the words, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."

At the time of the giving of rewards at the judgment bar of Christ there will no doubt be surprises and disappointments. Those who pushed themselves by shrewd bargaining and cold calculation will find that their machinations in the end did them no good. Some have even violated the trust that was put in them, when they saw the opportunity to secure personal advantage. They excused their action by convincing themselves that the end justified the means.

So today, there is a great bargaining going on in the Kingdom of Heaven. Men are jockeying for position. They want money; for to them money is power, and godliness is gain. They prosper for a while, but in the end all their scheming is of no avail. For rewards will not be given out on the basis of the size of the show that can be made in this world; but the question will be, did they play the game according to the rules? Our reward will be based upon our faithfulness to our task, our love for our brethren, our devotion to God. Cold calculation does not enter into the thinking of the true follower of Christ. He makes no bargains, no demands, except that which is the result of his own faith. He is content that he is called of God and permitted to work in His vineyard, be-

lieving that the Lord of the Harvest will do for him what is just and right. In this regard we take the liberty to quote a paragraph from Henry Calderwood's *The Parables of Our Lord*:

> "Christ is in the midst of His disciples as one who condemns all quarrelling which can be traced to jealousy, and warns His people to guard resolutely against the comparisons which easily lead to such disputes, and thereby to the fostering of an evil spirit. There is continual danger in Christ's Church from neglect of this condemnation and warning. In every heart lurks the evil, which is quick in throwing its influence over the eye, inclining the observer and critic to see evil where it does not exist, and to take no account of the good. It is part of Christian discipline in this life to keep down thoughts as to distinctions among the workers, comparisons of the honours gathered by ourselves with those received by others, and restlessness of spirit when those who have done less work seem to have equal reward. Such calculations are pernicious and contrary to the Christian spirit. The servant of Christ who allows himself to be swayed by them, fails in the duty of self-consecration, descending to the position of the mercenary who works only for wages, and cares little for the work and its results, if only he obtain the pay he expects and desires."

We may note in closing that prophetically the parable no doubt has special reference to the Jews. The Jews were the ones who received the first call of God, and they must answer to the first group who were sent into the vineyard. Nevertheless they became dissatisfied. They objected to the Gentiles and the uncircumcised entering the vineyard and laboring with them. So God gave them their portion and they walked out of the harvest to wander throughout all nations of the world. Thus came to pass the saying, "The last shall be first, and the first last."

Chapter 27

The Great Supper

"Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at suppertime to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that the servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper" (Luke 14:16-24).

This parable and the one of the marriage of the king's son in many respects resemble one another, yet they are clearly distinct. The great supper parable was spoken at a much earlier period in our Lord's ministry than the other, before the antagonism against Him had been fully developed. Indeed this first parable was related in the house of one of the chief Pharisees. On the other hand, the parable of the marriage feast was spoken in the temple court just before His passion.

Thus the first parable was given while there was still some hope that the leaders of the nation might yet be won to allegiance, while the latter parable was spoken when such hope had been abandoned and the Jews' hatred of the Lord had reached a point that it could not be satisfied short of His death.

Consequently, the latter parable is far more severe. In that parable the "remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." Moreover, the wrath of the king was manifest the more terribly and "he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their cities."

In the last parable the Messianic claim is emphasized more strongly, and the giver of the feast is no longer "a certain man" but a king, and the occasion is not just a "supper" but it is the marriage of the king's son. We must regard the two parables as altogether distinct. In the latter parable we see the rejection of the Jews and the prophecy given of the destruction of their city. In the parable in Luke we note God's turning from the priests and the Pharisees and offering the privileges of the Gospel to the despised portion of the people—the publicans and harlots—who knew not the law.

The parable of the great supper is clearly a representation of the Gospel feast that God offers in this present dispensation. At the beginning he "bade many," though not all. The Law, which was given to the children of Israel, brought redemption and spoke of better things to come, though it was not perfect. Israel was alerted to the news that there was a great feast coming, and they were to be ready to accept the invitation when it would be offered to the nation.

The feast offered many things. It included the "riches of his grace, the living waters of salvation, and the partaking of the Holy Ghost." There was "the children's bread" of healing. Many other dainties had been prepared for the great banqueting hall where the guests were to be invited. Indeed it was a banquet unexcelled in richness for all those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness.

The time had therefore come that all preparations were complete. Students of history may note how the world itself had been prepared for the coming of Christ. The various religions of the world had proven decadent and inadequate to serve the needs of mankind. The nations had been brought under the dominion of Rome, which made it possible for missionaries to go freely from one nation to another and deliver the invitation to the Gospel feast. Great roads had been built so that cities and nations were made accessible to travelers.

But more than that, the Law had been a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ. The Law was imperfect in that it had no power to deliver men from the bondage of sin. Among Israel's faithful there

was a deep heart-cry that God would send His Redeemer, the Messiah, into the world to fulfill the promise of redemption spoken by the prophets. And so it was that in the fulness of time God sent His own Son into the world, who with His disciples would proclaim the invitation to the great Gospel feast.

It was related in the parable that at suppertime he sent his servant to those who were bidden saying, "Come; for all things are now ready."

It would surely have been thought that the call would have brought an enthusiastic response. The invitations previously had been formally accepted, but suddenly they were rejected. What had happened?

It is a matter of common observation that it is easy to pledge one's self for the future and to enter into obligations which do not interfere with present plans. Many accept indefinite invitations readily, and then never give them a second thought. These men in the parable had been bidden to the feast and they had their names enrolled as invited guests. But as time passed they had become absorbed in the affairs of life; and gradually they forgot the invitation and the pledge.

But God, the giver of the Gospel feast, had not forgotten. He does not forget agreements that are made. The time came for those who had been bidden to fulfill their appointment. If they did not attend the feast they would be guilty of a gross insult. The invitation meant that they were to enter into a new and intimate relationship with Him. To refuse meant that the friendship had come to an end.

Many people look upon heaven at the end of life as a pleasant prospect. They are like the man who sat in the Pharisee's house and said, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." It is a comfortable thought to weigh against life's disappointments. But it is a different matter when the call of the Kingdom of God suddenly breaks in upon the interests and excitements of the entrancing present. The invitation in a way has the effect of bringing things to a crisis. Everyone who is bidden must sit down at the great feast or break forever with the One who gave the invitation.

Nevertheless, we are told that "they all with one consent began to make excuse." There were many refusals but we see them represented in the parable in three forms of excuses which may be considered to embrace all the explanations.

One had bought a certain property, and in his anticipation of the pleasure of possession he declined to be present at the banqueting table. This man had prospered so that he had been able to purchase a choice piece of land, and he desired nothing so much as to walk over it and consider how he could improve it.

Another had purchased five yoke of oxen—a large number for those days—and he was thinking of his ploughing, sowing, reaping, bringing home the fruits of his fields, and receiving a fine profit on a favorable market. And so men today with their minds filled with stocks, bonds, trading, gaining money, and properties are too preoccupied to give even one day to the cause of the Kingdom of God.

Another had taken himself a wife. Certainly this act in itself is legitimate, both proper and honorable but he should have brought his bride to the feast. It is tragic when the blessings of a family circle are allowed to become a snare. As Henry Calderwood says:

> "But it is unspeakably solemn and awful that any two (persons) however closely knit, should consider nothing higher than themselves, agreeing that love should make their souls godless instead of pointing their eyes upward and inclining their hearts to walk in company to everlasting habitations."

The servant having seen that his invitations had all been refused, returned to communicate the disappointing results to his lord. Who was his servant? Obviously he represents those who are commissioned to carry the invitation to the Gospel feast. They give the message, but outside of using persuasive influence they can not force them to come.

The master having heard how his invitation had been refused, became angry and gave an urgent command:

> "So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" (Luke 14:21).

The king's work requires haste. The servant was to go out and carry the invitation into the streets and lanes of the city, to bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. There are different things that are suggested by the parable. The fact that the feast is called a *supper* indicates that it is given in the closing hours of the dispensation. It indicates that the refusal means a wider

call and in some respects a transferred invitation. The ones who had been originally invited were the Jews. But the parable hints it will be transferred to those previously left out—the Gentiles. As Paul and Barnabas at Antioch said, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

But the parable speaks of more than this. The invitation became all-inclusive—it takes in the very poor, the most miserable, the ill-favored people. The publicans and the harlots, and those who have been outside religious influence were invited to come and share in the feast.

More than that, the reference to "the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" is very suggestive. Here is a broad hint that this call will have a special appeal to those who are sick and afflicted—that the Gospel first will bring to them healing, which is called by Jesus "the children's bread" (Matt. 15:26). Surely the great feast will include healing for those who are afflicted and out of the way. Indeed, it is so. This great call to the supper includes the promise of full deliverance to those who have need. And today many who are sitting at the Master's table have partaken of healing and health for body and soul. They have come to Christ poor, neglected, broken in the toils of sin and they have been saved, nourished, and now rejoice as the children of faith at the bounteous table that God has prepared.

Nevertheless, the servant came to his lord and showed him that his command had been carried out, but that still there was room. Wonderful news! The master was pleased to hear this. He gives a new order:

> "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

The servant was to go out of the city into the highways and hedges and to compel them to come in. That meant he was to carry the invitation to those out of the way, to those who were strangers and foreigners, those in the remote parts who would be given the privilege to be "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Indeed this parable echoes the very words of the Lord's command in the Great Commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Moreover, the master instructs the servant to "compel them to come in." Such words were not spoken to those originally bidden, who had coldly turned down the invitation. But the ignorant, the unlearned, and the underprivileged who had been bruised by many sufferings, the master advised the servant to "compel," that is, constrain them with all persuasiveness to come into the spiritual feast. The master realized the woes and sorrows of the lost multitudes and their disadvantages and wanted his servant to press the invitation greatly, "that my house may be filled."

But we must return to the early picture of the master and his deep displeasure with those who had refused his invitation. He said, "For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." From this we may see that no offence in the sight of God is so grave as a refusal to accept his invitation to the Gospel feast:

> "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb. 2:3).

For men to be content with the engagements and possessions and pleasures of this world and to neglect the call of God to eternal salvation is to incur the anger and unchangeable displeasure of God. It is a fearful thing to become the object of divine wrath. What a dread reality is the judgment, "None of those men shall taste of my supper."

In this parable we see the universality of salvation. The guests came from all ranks and spheres. They came from every tongue, tribe, and people. None was excluded from the invitation. The poorest were there, the ignorant, those wounded and beaten in the battle of life. The publicans and harlots, representing the most sinful, when they came in penitence were given entrance. Those who wandered far in sin, the lame, the halt, and the blind were accepted. And this has come about through the testing process of an open and free invitation.

Not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble respond to God's call, but the poor and the suffering seem to be among the most numerous who come. But all who come have this in common: they honor the Master as the giver of all good, and they rejoice in the bounties of His great feast and the security and shelter of His house.

Chapter 28

The Royal Wedding

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests" (Matt. 22:1-10).

This is the third of a series of parables in which were reflected the spirit and attitude of the Jewish nation. In the first the Jewish rulers were made to see and declare their own guilt. In the second they decreed their own punishment. The third carries on where the second leaves off.

In this parable of the wedding there is presented for our attention a king who reigned over a vast kingdom. He was not only a king, but he was also a father. The king represents God the Father. The father had a well-beloved son. He was the heir for whom the inheritance was intended. He was Christ, begotten of the Father. He had also been begotten in the resurrection glory, for of that God says, "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee."

The father prepared a marriage for his son. Just as it was not good for Adam to be alone, so it was not good for the Second Adam to remain alone forever. So it is that God has for two thousand years been calling and preparing a Bride for His Son.

In connection with the marriage, the father prepared a great feast. At the proper time the father sent his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding. The servants sent forth to tell those who had been previously advised about the wedding to make preparation to attend the festivities.

What happened? Those that were invited flatly refused. They gave no excuses; they just refused. The king supposed that those invited had not understood the invitation, so he sent other messengers. But upon receiving the invitation the second time they not only refused it, but joked and made light of it. They went their separate ways, some to their farms and others to their businesses. They were interested in increasing their material possessions, and they had no time for such things.

Of his number there was a certain group that was actually hostile. Who were these? They were the self-righteous religious leaders of the time. They seized the messengers, treated them spitefully and slew them. How did this conduct affect the king? He was angry. His son had been insulted. Hitherto he had been very gracious toward those who had been invited and made explanations to them as to why they should be present. But once his messengers had been killed he was aroused to action. He sent forth his armies and destroyed the murderers and burned up their city. What did that signify? The parable referred to the Jews and Jerusalem. *Forty years later the city was destroyed and vast numbers of its inhabitants were slain.*

The king said, "The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy." Who then was to attend the wedding? The king now gave his servants a second command:

> "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests" (Matt. 22:9-10).

Here we see the calling of the Gentiles and the formation of the Church on earth. Who are the servants who give the invitation? They are the ministers, the evangelists, the personal workers,

the Sunday school teachers, and all others who seek to win the lost to Christ. They were told to go out on the highways and on the byways, and wherever they found anyone to invite them to the wedding feast. They were not to discriminate but to give the invitation to whosoever will, even if it meant bringing in the bad with the good. We remember that there were both tares and wheat, and good and bad fishes in the Kingdom of Heaven. This visible church is made up of both those who are converted and those who profess to be converted.

The feast was spread and the people began to come, and they continued to come until every seat was taken and the number was complete.

The scene now changed. The king himself appeared. It did not pertain to the dignity of the king to be there until all the guests had assembled. But he and his party entered to be greeted with acclaim. But there was a blot on the feast. What was the shadow that marred the happy occasion? We are told that there was a man there "which had not on the wedding garment." Convention requires appropriate dress at a wedding. Nevertheless, instead of instantly condemning the man, the king with gracious condescension presumed that an explanation could be offered:

> "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him. Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless" (Matt. 22:11-12).

The man had no explanation; he was speechless. Therefore, the servants (not the same servants who issued the invitation, but the angels) were commanded to bind him and to cast him out:

> "Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:13-14).

Whom does this intruder represent? What is the wedding garment that he failed to wear? A clue is found in the words of the tenth verse—"The servants . . . gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good." But who are to be considered the good? Jesus told the rich young ruler that there was "none good but God." In its ultimate sense there is none good but God. In another sense of goodness, obedience to the preaching of the Gospel, Jesus spoke of the good ground as hearers who with "an

honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it." The good, therefore, were those who heard the invitation given by the servants and followed instructions.

Since these had on the wedding garment, it is evident that they had been told it was necessary and had complied with the requirement. But the man in question did not have it on. Why not? He had his own robe, apparently supposing that it was just as good. He was proud of that robe and refused to accept the king's wedding garment. He accepted formally the wedding invitation, but decided to wear his own robe.

What does the man with his robe represent? The answer is clear. The wedding garment represents God's righteousness which those who come to the wedding must wear.

No one can make himself ready for the Kingdom of himself. The prophet Isaiah said, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). The bride of Christ does not depend on her righteousness, but she attires herself in garments of linen that are given to her. "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19:8). Neither the bride nor those who attended the wedding feast were to come clothed in their own garments. But the man in question came clothed in his own attire.

Here we have a perfect type of the unconverted professor of religion. He is clothed in his own good works, his own righteousness. But God looks upon man's righteousness as filthy rags. Paul declared in his day that there were many going about seeking to establish their own righteousness who would not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God is that which is imputed to us through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what happens? The man intent on his own self-willed course paid no heed to what was told him until he stood before the king. When the king asked him where his wedding garment was he was speechless. He had nothing to say. As the parable closes we are told that the man was bound hand and foot and taken and cast into the outer darkness. That this man was not the only one who attended the feast unprepared, but represents a vast class of professors of religion, is seen in the final words of the parable, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Chapter 29

The Wicked Husbandman

> "Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:33-44).

This parable is recorded by three of the Gospels, thus evidencing its importance. It and the *Parable of the Two Sons* were spoken immediately following the Pharisees' challenge of Jesus' authority. The Lord had answered their challenge by asking them whether the baptism of John was of heaven or of man. When they saw the risk of answering this question and replied that they could not tell, Jesus followed by speaking two parables.

There is no room for doubt as to the interpretation of the parable. The chief priests perceived that he spake of them (Matt. 21:45).

The parable opens with a statement that a certain householder planted a vineyard. He hedged it, digged a winepress, built a tower, and let it out to certain husbandmen. The householder of course, as the proprietor and owner of the vineyard, represents God. He let it out to husbandmen who were to give a certain return.

The vineyard represents God's kingdom in the world (Verse 43). This kingdom was placed in possession of the children of Israel. They were to be unto God "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:6).

The throne of Israel was spoken of as the very throne of the Lord (I Chron. 29:23). God placed a defense around the nation. God was a strong tower to His people. The fifth chapter of Isaiah describes the vineyard:

> "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved

touching his vineyard. My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes" (Isa. 5:1-2).

Having planted the vineyard, he put the vineyard in the charge of husbandmen and departed to a far country and was gone a long time. The fruits of the vineyard were therefore temporarily transferred to the husbandmen, only that they must annually render to the proprietor that portion of the fruits that had been agreed upon.

> "And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one and killed another, and stoned another" (Matt. 21:34-35).

When the time to receive the fruit was at hand, the householder sent his servants to take portion of the fruits that was due him. But in the meantime, the husbandmen had consulted together and a spirit of greed had seized them; they planned ways and means that they could keep all the produce of the vineyard for themselves. The arrival of the householder's servants brought the matter suddenly to a head. There was no place for deception, for his agents were already there. Their early appearance crystallized the determination of the conniving husbandmen to keep the fruits for themselves.

Since the servants had a responsibility to discharge, they were insistent that their master should get his fair share. But as they pressed their demands for the fulfillment of the contract, the husbandmen resisted. Resorting to violence, they overwhelmed the servants, and in the struggle some were wounded and one was murdered outright. Those who escaped returned to inform their master of the sad result.

The householder was extremely restrained in his actions, and overlooking their treasonable deeds he sent other servants, more than the first. This time there was a greater demonstration of violence. The rebels had gone beyond the point of reconciliation. Seeing the success of their former rebellion and that the owner failed to do more than plead with them, they mistook it for weakness on his part and they were more determined than ever to keep the vineyard as their own.

What is the meaning of this parable? The wicked husbandmen, as we have seen, represented the religious and civil rulers of the nation—the priests and the Pharisees. As Jesus said, they sat in Moses' seat; therefore, they bore legal rule over the people, which was the vineyard of the Lord (Matt. 12:1-3).

The servants that were sent by the householder were the prophets that God had raised up. From time to time He sent these prophets with a message of warning, calling upon the nation to cease its rebellion and to render the fruits of righteousness unto God.

But instead of being kindly received by the priests and the religious authorities, the prophets were maltreated. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 23:34-35:

> "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."

Initial success sometimes gives a delusive sense of security to those who rebel against rightful authority. That immediate judgment does not fall upon them encourages them to indulge in greater impieties and insults against God. They mistake His forebearance for weakness on His part.

But the proprietor of the vineyard was fully aware of all that had taken place and of the guilt of those who had rebelled against him. Nonetheless, he determined to make one last attempt to obtain justice from the husbandmen. Therefore, he dispatched his own son with a party of attendants to go to the husbandmen and demand fulfillment of the contract. In due time the son appeared before them to present the householder's claim to the fruits.

Previously the action of the rebels had been more or less unpremeditated, but their previous successes in refusing payment and robbing the owner of his due, led to a more daring course. Why not kill the son? Would they not then be in a position to secure undisputed possession of the vineyard? Their vicious plan was carried out, and seizing the son they cast him out of the vineyard and murdered him. The band of servants who escaped their murderous intent fled from the scene to carry the grim tidings of what had happened to their master.

The teaching of the parable is obvious and was even recognized by the Pharisees. Their terrible plot to take Jesus and kill Him had been discovered and exposed, much to their anger.

The parable also reveals the long-suffering and mercy of God. Although punishment of the wicked husbandmen was past due, the householder reserved judgment and sent his son to induce obedience saying, "They will reverence my son." Thus Christ was sent forth as the official representative of the Father. But the chief priests in their madness and folly took Him and put Him to death, supposing that they could then appropriate all to themselves, quite forgetting that the Lord of the vineyard had never ceased to present His claim, and despite His longsuffering with them was not apt to relinquish His rights.

Having spoken the parable, Jesus turns to His listeners and asks, "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" He does not Himself pronounce the sentence. He asks the people themselves what justice demands for such a case. And some who hear Him, absorbed in the narrative and not anticipating its application, give a response:

> "They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21:41).

Destruction must be their inevitable doom. And this is what happened. God permitted a visitation of terrible judgment to come upon the Jews. Accepting the verdict of the people that the vineyard should be let out to other husbandmen who would render to the owner the fruits of their seasons, He said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Who then was that nation to whom was given the Kingdom of God? Romans 10 and 11 tell the story. That Kingdom was taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles (Romans 11:7-12). The Gentiles were "the foolish nation" which seeking not Christ, found Him, while Israel a disobedient and gainsaying people received Him not:

> "But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, *and by a foolish nation I will anger you.* But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:19-21).

Chapter 30

The Barren Fig Tree

> "He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke 13:6-9).

The *Parable of the Barren Fig Tree* is preceded by Christ's remarks concerning two tragic events that had happened in Jerusalem. One was the death of certain Galileans whom Pilate had put to death while they were offering sacrifices. The other was a reference to those who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell. Jesus said, "Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

Thus we see that the conversation had been on the people's thoughts of Jerusalem when Jesus spoke the *Parable of the Barren Fig Tree*. We may say that the parable primarily refers to the nation Israel and its people. God had chosen this people and had planted them in His vineyard; naturally He expected a favorable return. Instead, they had altogether disappointed His expectations, Jewry had become a reproach instead of a blessing, and the time had come when action had to be taken.

It was concerning this that Jesus spoke the parable. The man who owned the vineyard had come for three years, each year seeking fruit but finding none. Becoming discouraged over the prospect, he said to the dresser of the vineyard that he should cut down the tree, for "why cumbereth it the ground?"

John the Baptist, the fiery crusader had in his day cried out against the tree. He sounded the warning, "And now also the

axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Luke 3:9). However, the gardener, who represents Christ, interceded for the tree. Although justice demanded that the tree be cut down, the Lord, who represents the mercy of God, pled that it be spared, for He loved the tree. Therefore, He asked that it be given one more chance. He accepted the owner's verdict that the fig tree should be bearing figs, but he pled that before the death penalty be imposed inquiry should be made whether it was entirely the fig tree's fault. Let the tree have another year. Perhaps the fig tree needed more digging about it. Let the roots be given air and receive fertilization. Jesus realized that a generation trained under the scribes and Pharisees of that day was hardly in a condition to bear fruit. There needed to be considerable digging about the tree to ascertain just what its capabilities were. Even among Jesus' own followers there were those who scarcely knew their right hand from their left.

So the last year was to be a year of probation. The vinedresser did not pray, "Lord, never let it be cut down," but rather, "Let it not be cut down now." Christ was seeking a reprieve. It was to give Israel opportunity to repent that He asked for more time. Since God had borne so long, there might be hope that He would bear a little longer. Here is one of the most beautiful pictures of God's grace. When we might well expect that judgment could wait no longer, the Great Judge is persuaded to defer His wrath for even an additional time.

But although reprieves may be obtained through the prayers of others, pardons cannot. Pardons can only come as the result of our own faith, our own repentance, our own prayers. So the voice of the Lord goes forth, "Break up your fallow ground." "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord."

One year more! The word was, "If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Though God bear long He will not bear always. The axe is indeed waiting at the root of the tree!

And so the third and last year of the ministry of Christ came and went—and with it the final rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish nation. The Lord was in the final week of His earthly ministry when one morning as He walked from Bethany to Jerusalem He beheld a fig tree afar off. Being hungry, He thought to find fruit upon it:

"And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany,

he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it" (Mark 11:12-14).

Alas, the tree had leaves but bore no fruit. The irrevocable word went out. Jewry, represented by the fig tree, had proved to be sterile and barren; there was no further hope. And so the fig tree was cursed forever.

Was it really forever? In one sense, yes. That generation was delivered to judgment. Christ's words were stern when He said, "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:32-33).

Yet although that generation went down to darkness, God's promise to the nation Israel could not fail. This is beautifully portrayed in the Psalms:

> "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah" (Psa. 89:35-37).

Although a tree may be cut down it is possible that it will sprout again (Job 14:7). This is foreshadowed in Daniel 4, in a certain tree that had reached to heaven but was cut down for its haughtiness. This represented the judgment spoken against Nebuchadnezzar. The tree of Nebuchadnezzar's pride was to be cut down until "seven times shall pass over thee." At the end of the "seven times" the dead stump was revived and the tree grew again. Nebuchadnezzar who was punished for "seven times" and then restored to his kingdom, is a type of Israel which was to be chastened for "seven times" and finally restored.

That restoration of the tree of Israel, the fig tree, at the time of the return of Christ is seen in Luke 21:29-31:

> "And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

And this restoration we see being fulfilled even today as the

wandering Jew has returned at last after many centuries, back to his homeland. As we see the fig tree budding and shooting forth its leaves, we know that summer is nigh at hand. And prophetically, we perceive that this shooting forth of leaves of the Jewish fig tree means that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand also.

Chapter 31

The Two Sons

> "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28-32).

In the *Parable of the Two Sons* we are carried a step farther than in the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*. In this the penitent is taught how he can do service to God. After conversion he had to go through the avenues of grace, advance into the sphere of service. Beyond the prodigal's house with its scenes of rejoicing lay the vineyard that needed tending.

In this latter parable we are also told that a certain man had two sons, and he had a vineyard. A vineyard in the Scriptures is often figuratively depicting God's kingdom on earth. As we have previously noted, the fifth chapter of Isaiah in a beautiful parable likens the house of Israel and the men of Judah to His vineyard and His very pleasant plant. God planned that His vineyard be tended. Although the universe was created by God, and He cannot be enriched by any means or effort of men, He has so ordered the affairs of His kingdom that He is dependent on laborers.

In the parable the father called his sons to him and asked them to go to work in his vineyard. As the story unfolds we perceive that these two sons answer to the prodigal and his elder brother,

and again to the *Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.* And thus we may note close connection and continuity between these various parables. Thus in that of the prodigal, this younger son bewailed the fact that he had transgressed and in sincere repentance he desired to serve. On the other hand, the elder son claimed that all the time he had been serving his father; yet when it came right down to it, he was not in accord or sympathy with his father's viewpoint. Likewise with the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee made great claims of being God's favorite; but he despised others, such as the publican. Yet it was the publican, though he had once abandoned himself to such a sinful life, who had turned from it in deep repentance.

So in this parable the father says to his two sons, "Go work today in my vineyard." The demand was for *immediate service*: "Go work today." The result of the father's request was disappointing in both cases. One said, "I will not," and the other although he said he would, "went not."

These replies in general illustrate the immediate response of men to the call of God. One class refuses outright to obey the call, and the other assents but does not keep its promise. The one is openly defiant; the other gives some evidence of a disposition to obey but the promise of obedience is not kept. The plain teaching of the story is that all men fail, more or less, in rendering the service to God that is required of them.

This brief parable, simple as it is, underlines one of the most profound truths affecting God's dealings with the human race. It is a truth of such importance that it is well that we study it closely.

The call of God is such that it eventually brings out that side of a man's nature which is the stronger. For there are two sides to every nature of man, and the one that in the end will prevail is the stronger. Those two sides include the first natural inclination of a man, and the second and more important side, the action of the will. The call of God reveals which of the two is the stronger.

The natural inclination of a man does not fully reveal his true character; in fact it is not really a test of his character at all. Men who have lived in their inclinations and who have appeared to be the worst kind of men, in the end have become saints because their will was stronger than their inclinations. Such a one was St. Augustine. Some men like him have had the strongest passions and worst tendencies to fight against, but their will finally

chose the good and fought its way upward against tides and currents that seemed to swamp them.

To such men, when the call of God comes there is the natural tendency to resent it. The first response is of the inclination, not the will. The man sees his passions and is conscious of how strong they are; and despairing of any success, instinctively he turns from God's call. He says, "I will not." Nevertheless, this is a superficial reaction that comes from the surface and not the depths of his being. It is from his inclination, not his will.

After the inclinations have had their say, the will must answer, and it may clash with the former. Thus there arises a war in the soul, with the man in the center of the battle. Man finds himself by nature totally indisposed to serve God. But still deeper down is the will that says, "The right way is to serve God." The man in despair seeing no hope in himself says, "I will not." This is the condition in which Paul found himself:

> "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man . . . and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:19-24).

But Paul found the answer to his despairing cry. He found that the Spirit of God coming into his life would mortify or overcome his inclinations. Though his evil nature cried out to have its way, the *will* chose to take the hard, but not impossible, way. For in making the good choice, the Spirit of Christ came and liberated him from the law of the flesh.

> "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

Now let us notice the second son; although his answer was good his actual conduct is otherwise and is full of warning. He said, "I go, sir," but he went not. Here again we see conflict, but the result is the reverse of the former. This son had excellent intentions; his imagination was attracted to the good and the noble by visions of sacrifice and service. But alas, life is more than dreams, visions, and high ideals. There must be the practical exercise of the will to carry through. Here was a man whose

feelings could be stirred, but he did not take into account how bad a man he really was.

The good intentions of the second son had been aroused, but he was called to follow up with action. However, down deep within him there was no corresponding *will* to carry through. A voice within was saying all the time, "I will not go." The *will* is the court of last resort. It sits on the throne. A thousand inclinations of evil may come, but if the *will* chooses the good it will rule—not by its own strength of course, but by the Spirit of Christ that gives it the power to prevail.

And how does one receive the power of Christ to overcome? Not through good resolutions by themselves. That is what the second son depended upon—his good resolutions, but they failed him. What then is the answer? Repentance. The first son "afterward he repented, and went." Repentance alone opens the way for God's Spirit to empower the will and give it strength to overcome.

The lessons of the parable are impressive. The son who finally was obedient and answered the call to work in the vineyard looked around for his other brother, but he was not there. The defiant one became the penitent and went; the other had shrunk from high-handed rebellion and could not find it in himself to disobey openly, but he didn't go. He fooled himself into believing himself better than his brother, who had openly refused. But because his *will* did not follow his good intentions he faced himself hellward instead of heavenward.

It is remarkable that both of these men at the beginning would have judged themselves differently from what they really were. The first defiant son realized that his wickedness was so bad that he had to mend his ways. The second thought of himself as superior and lulled himself to his real danger; that is, his resolutions and good intentions were not enough to carry him through. Here the words of Jesus in John 7:17 are very significant: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." If a man will do God's will, he shall know the truth and the truth will set him free.

In closing, we may add that the parable has a prophetic and dispensational aspect. The Jew ever made his boast that he knew the will of God:

> "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approv-

est the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" (Rom. 2:17-21).

Therefore, the Jew receiving the call of God was saying, "I go sir." Nevertheless, he went not. The publicans and harlots lived in open disobedience to God; nevertheless the consciences of many of them heard the call and responded. Though all their evil inclinations were aroused within them, bidding them to continue in wicked indulgence, their *will prevailed*. As the publican who would not so much as lift his eyes toward heaven, they cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and God heard them and opened to them the Kingdom of Heaven, while the scribes and Pharisees were shut out!

Part 6:

Parables on the Second Coming

Parables on the Second Coming

If we were to attempt to select the most important group of all the parables we might not be far wrong to choose those that deal with the Second Coming. These parables speak of events which occur at the time Christ returns to earth. They are marked with a warning to be watching and waiting and in readiness for the Lord's coming.

In the *Parable of the Evil Servant* we are made to know that there are some who claim to be followers of Christ who will actually teach that the Lord delays His coming, perhaps even question whether He will return at all. Their destiny is to be appointed a portion with the hypocrites.

The Lord follows this up with the *Parable of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins.* That parable clearly teaches that of those who look for His coming only half will be ready to meet the Bridegroom.

The *Parable of the Pounds* shows that the Lord's return was not immediately after His going away. In the meantime His disciples were to "occupy till I come." As each servant was active to the limit of his ability at the time of his Lord's coming, so one received authority over ten cities, another five. There were varying degrees of reward. The reward was enlarged service. The unfaithful servant who failed to use what was given him, instead of receiving a reward, lost even that which he had.

Chapter 32

The Faithful and the Evil Servant

Christ was speaking about His return to earth (Matt. 24:27-31). He had been telling the disciples of various signs that should appear at that time. He noted the moral conditions that will exist, declaring that they will parallel those of the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39). He spoke of the salvation and preservation of the righteous, as prefigured by Noah and his family, and the destruction of the wicked in the judgment of the flood.

He spoke of one person's being taken and the other left. It was a warning for people to be ready, for they know not what hour Christ will come:

> "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:40-42).

He spoke of the goodman of the house, who if he had known what hour the thief would come, would have watched and not suffered the thief to invade his house and steal his goods. He was showing that as the thief comes at a most unlikely hour, so Christ will come and take many by surprise. Then Jesus gave to them a *Parable of the Faithful and the Evil Servant*:

> "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that

he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 24:45-51).

In this parable Jesus spoke of the faithful minister and teacher of the Word of God. The household referred to is the house of God, and those belonging to the household are His people. The Lord wills that they receive the meat of the Word of God in due season. The Word is important. Many ministers today—instead of teaching the Scriptures—preach social reform, philosophy, politics, book reviews, and everything but the Word of God. The servant who is faithful in all his house will receive the Lord's blessing. Yea, he will be given a rich reward. He shall be made ruler over all the Lord's goods.

The point is faithfulness. The reward of faithfulness is promotion to service in a higher sphere. Our service to God does not terminate with our life on earth. It continues in the world to come. God has an exalted plan for those who are faithful in His service. It will involve His great program of the ages of ages to come.

The scene then shifts to another man whom Christ mentions as the evil servant. He is a spurious minister of the Gospel, a professor of religion who possesses nothing. This servant took on himself the name of Christ, but he was a hypocrite. He professed to believe the Scriptures and its teachings, but in fact he denied them. For one thing, he was skeptical that Christ would return. In his heart he said, "My lord delayeth his coming." This is a real clue to his downfall. He doubted the truth of the Lord's return. He had many glib explanations that quite satisfied him as to what the Lord meant when He said He would come again. He especially took issue with those who believed literally the Lord's warning "in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

Some teach that Christ returned in A. D. 70 at the destruction of Jerusalem, confusing the two events as set forth in Luke 21:20-28. Others declared that Jesus returned on the Day of Pentecost, whereas the Lord plainly said that the Holy Spirit was *another* Comforter who would come if He went away (John 16:7).

Still others teach that the Lord's Second Coming is His coming into a person's life, or as formal churches teach, when a man is baptized or professes religion. In all these cases there is no earnest watching or expectancy of the Lord's return. Every-

one goes about his business, seemingly expecting all things to continue as they are forever. Eventually some reach the place where they scoff at the doctrine of the Lord's return, even as II Peter 3:3-4 declares:

> "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

The abandonment of the truth of the Lord's imminent return results in apostasy. Little by little the false servant departs from the faith. He lives a life of indulgence, eating and drinking with the drunken. He may actually become a slave to the vices of the wicked. These things lead into further sin until he fulfills the picture against which the Lord has warned. The evil servant may assume a place of authority over the brethren. This deadly spirit of ecclesiasticism seeks to enforce its will upon others. Men are told what they must do, where they must go; they are taught to lean upon the arm of flesh rather than upon God. This is the situation in much of the nominal church today. Those in power lust for more power. And thus is God's plan for the headship of Christ made of no effect.

Denial of the truth of Christ's Second Coming gradually results in the corruption of doctrine and practice. What finally happens to this evil servant? We are told that the Lord comes in a day when he looketh not for him and he is cut asunder and his portion is with the hypocrites. In other words he is lost forever. The parable ends with that servant's terrible awakening, and his fruitless remorse. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Chapter 33

The Ten Virgins

> "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Matt. 25:1-4).

The parable opens with the word "then." Thus it connects with the previous verses which all deal with events occurring at the time of Christ's coming. It concerns ten virgins of a bridal party who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. There is no mistaking who the bridegroom is, for he plainly represents Christ.

The dominant question, which has resulted in much controversy, is just what part of the visible church do the ten virgins represent. We know that in Scripture symbolism the number *ten* signifies completeness. The ten virgins therefore represent the Church of Christ as it exists today, and the portrayal is the final scene, or the event that occurs at the very coming of the Lord.

But do the ten virgins represent the good and evil in the Kingdom of Heaven? Do they represent the righteous and the wicked, the wheat and the tares, the good fishes and the bad? There are several reasons why we cannot accept this view. In the preceding parable the faithful and evil servants are all included. The circumstance that specially marked the evil servant was that he said, "My lord delayeth his coming." And having taken that view, he consorted with those who spent their time in drinking and gluttony. He also resorted to dominating his fellow-servants and to usurping authority over them. He was altogether a hypocrite, a spurious Christian, a blind leader of the blind, to whom is reserved swift judgment at the coming of the Lord.

On the other hand, the ten virgins all looked forward to the imminent return of the bridegroom, anticipating it before the time. We must understand that these virgins represent quite a different company from the preceding knave who masqueraded as a servant of Christ, but who actually was an apostate from the faith.

The term "virgins" has a distinctive application in the Scriptures. Paul speaks of the believer as "a chaste virgin" separated unto Christ.

> "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor. 11:2).

Again the word *virgins* as used in Revelation 14:4 designates the firstfruits unto God in whom there is no guile:

> "These are they which were not defiled with women; for *they are virgins*. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:4-5).

Psalm 45 portrays a scene of Christ's coming forth from ivory palaces to meet His bride—"the king's daughter is all glorious within"—and who is followed by "the virgins her companions" (Psa. 45:6-15).

If we follow the imagery employed by the Scriptures, we must conclude that a virgin represents a believer who has separated himself from the world. It does not have reference to sex or to the married state as such. A "virgin" as the term is symbolically used in the Scriptures is a follower of Christ who is not defiled with spiritual fornication or adultery such as James alludes to in the fourth chapter and fourth verse:

> "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Professing Christians who flirt with the world are guilty of spiritual harlotry and cannot be considered to be "a virgin" in the Scriptural sense.

The term "ten virgins" must be understood to include all true believers within the Church visible. The number *ten* prefigures

the Church's many organizations, groups, nationalities, and forms of service that are in existence at the end of the dispensation. They answer to the "good seed" and the "good fish" of the other parables.

We are told that the ten virgins took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. What are the lamps? "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet," says the psalmist. It was by means of the lamp that they were enabled to go out into the darkness of the night to meet the bridegroom. It is by means of the Word of God that the Lord's people are enabled to know and understand the glorious truth of the coming of Christ. In a symbolic sense the Word which was made flesh became the Light of the world (John 1:1-14). It is because of the Light which came to all men that we can bear witness to that Light (John 1:6-9). In a certain sense all believers in Christ are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14).

Until this point, the ten virgins appear as one united band sharing the same expectations and having a common interest in the same event. But a difference appears, and it is manifest in the preparations that were made. Five were wise and five were foolish. In the case of five, their preparations were insufficient. Although all the virgins carried a bright shining lamp in their right hand, only half of them carried a store of sufficient oil along with them to replenish the lamp during the long night watches. As to the meaning of the oil, there is general agreement. The oil is the standard symbol for the Holy Spirit. God intends His people to be anointed with that oil, even as Christ was anointed.

Jesus received His baptism of the Spirit at the river Jordan (Luke 3:21-22). Being full of the Spirit, He was led of the Spirit to be tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1). When the temptations were finished He returned in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14), and when He began His ministry, He declared that the Lord had anointed Him to preach the Word of deliverance.

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

When the apostle Peter preached to the house of Cornelius,

he spoke of God's anointing Jesus of Nazareth for His ministry (Acts 10:38).

John the apostle declares that Christ's disciples are anointed by this same Spirit (I John 2:20, 27). "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you."

We have another picture of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the command to the elders to pray for the sick. The elders were to anoint with oil, which was a symbol of the Spirit's presence and power to heal (James 5:14).

The next point of the parable that we notice is that all the ten virgins had some oil in their lamps at the beginning. For lamps will not burn at all without some oil. Neither can lamps go out as mentioned in Verse 8 unless they have first been burning. And certainly the virgins could not have ventured out into the darkness of the night if their lamps were not burning at all. This is a point that is often missed. If we allow that the oil represents the Holy Spirit, then we must concede that all the virgins had some oil.

Where then was the difference between the wise virgins and the foolish virgins? We are told plainly that the foolish "took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." They took oil in their vessels. They carried an extra supply. Paul tells us we carry this treasure in earthen vessels, our bodies, and this power shines forth "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God."

> "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Cor. 4:6-7).

Every believer has a measure of the Holy Spirit. As the apostle says, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). Indeed "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12:3). Nevertheless, there are measures of the Spirit. Christ received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). It is Christ's purpose that we should receive the baptism of the Spirit as rivers of living water:

> "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath

said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:37-39).

And this pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh is the preeminent message of the Book of Acts. Although the disciples had received the Holy Spirit by measure (John 20:22), they were to receive the mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost as promised by Jesus (Acts 1:4-5). After the Day of Pentecost the apostles were insistent that all disciples should receive the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 8:14-16; 19:1-6). Thus the Spirit would not only be with them, but should dwell in them (John 14:17).

It is evident that this full measure of the Spirit is what the foolish virgins lacked. They had the Spirit in a measure, for no man can say Jesus is Lord save by the Spirit (John 3:3-5; I Cor. 12:3). But this is different from being filled with the Spirit. Our bodies or "vessels" are none other than the temple of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 6:19). To fulfill God's purpose in our lives and to be ready to meet the bridegroom, we need to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

The parable informs us that there was an unexpected delay. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (Matt. 25:5). The group of maidens had gone a considerable distance to a prearranged gathering place where they were to await signal of the bridegroom's approach. But as the night advanced and the ordinary time of repose had passed, conversation began to lag and drowsiness set in. Finally the virgins fell into deep slumber.

The introduction of the element of sleep suggests an interval of time in which apparently the bridegroom delayed his coming. It also suggests something else—that because of the long delay, many who watched for the coming would fall asleep in Jesus. At the coming of Christ these would awaken and join those still alive.

There is a spiritual sleep, however, that Paul warns us against. "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (I Thes. 5:6).

Sleep speaks of inactivity. When people are asleep they are unconscious of what goes on around them. Danger may be nearby, but they are unaware of it. The house may be on fire, imperiling the whole family; but while people sleep they know nothing of it.

The sleep of the virgins perhaps indicates other things. It illustrates the abandonment of the Church in the middle centuries to the hope of the Second Coming. For a time the Early Church like the ten virgins of the parable, was in eager expectation of the Lord's return. Slowly the Church lost that hope. Due to the long delay of the return of the Lord, the truth of the Lord's coming was gradually forgotten. Along with the waning of that hope was a decline of spiritual life in the Church. Christians became indifferent and apathetic.

But suddenly at midnight a cry was made:

> "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all the virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps" (Matt. 25:6-7).

Midnight was the hour when the bridegroom was least expected. There are two ways in which we can understand this. We can assume that was the actual moment when the bridegroom came, or else take it as the time when the cry anticipating his coming was made. Let us consider the very first as betokening the awakening of the Church to the great truth of the Second Coming.

The warning to watch is in the last verse of the parable, "For ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:13). There are four periods of time suggested by the parable. In ancient reckoning the night was divided into four watches: six to nine, nine to midnight, midnight to three, three to six.

(1) There was the first period when the ten virgins readied their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. This answers to the period of the Early Church. Christians in that day eagerly looked forward to the return of Christ. It was a time in which the Church was alert and active in the work of their Lord.

(2) Then there was a period—because of the bridegroom's delay—that the virgins who were weary with watching fell into deep slumber. How long they slept we do not know. During this time the Church lost, or became only dimly aware of the hope of Christ's Second Coming. It was a period of moral and spiritual apathy in the Church. This period answers to the second watch.

(3) Then came the midnight hour and the beginning of the third watch. The virgins were awakened with the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him." This cry awakened the virgins, and they arose and began to trim their

lamps. There never has been a time in the present century when there has been such a heralding of the message of the Second Coming throughout the earth.

(4) Finally there came the moment when the bridegroom actually came, which answers to the fourth watch. We are verily in that period now. The nearness of His coming is changing from imminency to immediacy.

While the parable suggests this picture of the changing attitude of the Church at various periods toward the Second Coming, it seems evident that the main purpose of the parable is to focus attention in particular on events occurring at the very time of the coming of the bridegroom—that the midnight hour, the darkest hour of the night, is the very time when the bridegroom comes. It was the midnight hour when the first-born of Egypt was slain, and a mighty cry of anguish went up unto God in that land (Exod. 12:29-30).

It is a general view even among secular observers of the significance of events happening in the world, that we are living in the eleventh hour of the history of the world. It has been pointed out as a curious fact, the strange coincidence—if it be coincidence—involved in World War I, a war which ushered in this unprecedented hour in history. The war came to an end at:

The eleventh hour of
The eleventh day of
The eleventh month of the year 1918,
Eleven months after General Allenby entered Jerusalem on the Eleventh day of December, 1917.

There has been a saying which has had wide circulation, especially since the appearance of the atomic bomb; the saying is, "It is later than you think." Often a clock is pictured with the hands pointing suggestively to ten minutes, seven minutes, or even two minutes to twelve. It is generally recognized by both Christians and nominal Christians that the world has entered into the eleventh hour of its history, and the striking of the midnight hour cannot be afar off:

> "Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Matt. 25:7-9).

With the cry, all the virgins arose and began trimming their lamps. It was at this moment that the folly of the five foolish virgins became evident. Due to the long delay of the bridegroom the oil supply had run low, and their lamps were flickering, ready to go out. They were not yet ready to admit that their cause was desperate. They went to work trimming and cutting away the carbon from the wicks which hindered the bright shining of their lamps. But to no avail, for wick-trimming is not enough if there is a lack of oil. The foolish virgins turned to their companions, if perchance they had exceeded their requirements and were able to lend them a sufficient supply of oil. But their appeal was in vain. It would not have done for all the lamps to go out, for none would have been able to meet the bridegroom.

One thing that this part of the parable teaches seems very clear. There will be a great dismay among a certain part of the Church at the Coming of Christ. We speak not of those who deny His coming altogether, such as the unfaithful servant, but those who truly look for His coming—who will have a terrible realization that they are unprepared to meet the Bridegroom. They have indeed looked forward to the event, and now the awful truth comes to them that they are not ready. What is wrong? They do not have oil in their vessels with their lamps. In the parable they were advised to go to them that sold oil, and obtain a supply.

The question may be asked whether it is posssible to "buy" the Holy Spirit? We must remember that this parable and other parables use the expression of buying and selling, such as in the *Parable of the Merchantman and His Pearls.* In a certain sense we are told to "buy the truth and sell it not." Indeed the Lord has instructed the lukewarm Laodicean church to "buy of me gold tried in the fire" and "white raiment."

> "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:18).

It is to be noticed that the latter warning was given in connection with Christ's standing outside the door. In the matter of actual dollars and cents, of course the Holy Spirit cannot be bought (Acts 8:20). Nevertheless, in a true sense the treasures of God must be purchased at a price, at a sacrifice. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take

up his cross, and follow me" Matt. 16:24). In the *Parable of the Tower,* Jesus taught that a man should sit down and count the cost before he decides to embark on an undertaking that he may not be able to finish (Luke 14:28-30).

> "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:10-13).

In the meantime, the foolish virgins had gone to those who sold and replenished their oil supply. While they were gone the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went into the marriage and the door was shut, When the foolish virgins finally arrived, they knocked on the door and said, "Lord, Lord, open to us."

But the shutting of the door has a solemn significance. It means that a substantial number of Christians who are looking forward to the coming of the Lord, and who are anticipating the joy of the marriage feast, are going to be left out.

What bitter thoughts of self-reproach must have overtaken the foolish virgins! There were those long hours while the bridegroom delayed, when they could have made good their oversight. But they had permitted the golden opportunity to pass them by, and this apparently is the picture of a large part of the professing church.

It is to be noted that the bridegroom did not say, "I never knew you," as Christ did to the workers of iniquity in Matthew 7:21-23. He said to them, "I know you not." That is, I cannot recognize you as members of the bridal party. They had missed God's best. Bitter tears of remorse could not change the fact.

There is a teaching abroad that everyone who is saved will participate in the rapture of the Church. The Scriptures, however, teach just the opposite. Jesus Himself said, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). "One shall be taken and the other shall be left."

And what about the bride? Although the bride plays a most important role in any wedding, she is not mentioned by name

here. The five wise virgins were not the bride. They were the attendants of the bride. Who and where was the bride?

In a certain sense, the whole Church is the bride of Christ. In a particular sense, it appears that there is a group within the group that makes up the bride of Christ, the firstfruits unto God. The bride is altogether like unto the bridegroom. She has entered into His sufferings, His death, and into His glorious resurrection. While the virgins slept, she was awake all the time. It is hardly appropriate that the bride be asleep at the time of her wedding! She was waiting expectantly. Her lamp was always ready. And when at last the bridegroom and his party were heard approaching in the distance, was it not her voice that cried, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him"?

We have made a previous reference to Psalm 45 in which the bridegroom and the bride and the virgins are seen. In bringing this study of the parable to a close, we quote from its words. Notice particularly Verse 10 and what follows. It is the call of the bride. She was brought unto the king, and it was "the virgins her companions that follow her."

> "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour. The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace" (Psa. 45:8-15).

Chapter 34

The Pounds

> "And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:11-13).

As Jesus left the city of Jericho and drew nigh to Jerusalem He saw the spirit of expectancy that had taken possession of the multitude. They were about to acclaim Him King. Indeed the multitude would shortly be crying out to the people of Jerusalem, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38). They little realized that within a few days their King would be hanging on a cruel cross, and the joyful multitude would be scattered and gone.

Jesus, therefore, felt it was necessary to disabuse the minds of the people of this delusion in which they supposed that the Kingdom of God was about to appear. He had to show both the multitude and His disciples that He was not then going up to Jerusalem to sit on a throne. In order to correct their expectations, He gave them the *Parable of the Pounds,* which assured them that the Kingdom of God would come, though the time was not immediately. Many events were to transpire before the kingdom would be outwardly manifested.

In the meantime the Kingdom would be on earth, but it would be in mystery form. During that time His disciples would be going about their business working for the Lord. The parable was given to teach them that they had to restrain their impatience and follow the plan that the Lord had for them.

The story began with a nobleman who was going into a far

country to receive a kingdom. Before he took his departure, he called his servants to him and made each one a steward of a pound of money, which would be, according to some estimates, about thirty-five dollars. Then he instructed them to "occupy till I come." After a considerable space of time the nobleman received the kingdom and returned. He called together his servants to whom he had committed the money to see how they had prospered in their trading. One man's pound had gained ten. Another's had increased to five. Each was given a reward for faithful service. But another had taken his talent and wrapped it up in a napkin. He was punished for his slothfulness, and the citizens who were his enemies were destroyed. Let us look at the parable and its meaning:

The nobleman is without doubt Christ. Being born of the Spirit of God of a virgin, He was of noble rank. As Son of the Most High, He was claimant of the crown. As the Son of David through Mary, He was to sit on the throne of David and reign forever (Luke 1:32-33). This Kingdom was to be received from the Father, rather than from human hands. In fact, when men tried to give the crown to Him, He rejected it (John 6:15). This rejection of the Kingdom from the hands of men implied that the Lord was to return to heaven, the "far country," with the possibility that He would be gone a long time.

The smallness of the sum given the servants is also significant. While Christ was inheritor of all power in heaven and in earth, at the time He left the world He was in a condition of deep poverty and humiliation. He could not, therefore, shower upon His disciples great amounts of wealth. In the nobleman's going into a far country, we see portrayed the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

The illustration that the Lord gave was familiar to the minds of the people. Jesus related the parable near Jericho, where a few years previous to that, Archelaus, whose palace was in Jericho, went to far-off Rome to be invested with his royal authority. In this connection it is interesting to note that an opposition party sent a deputation to Rome to protest against Archelaus' reigning over them.

In Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father, He went into the far country to receive the Kingdom. Thus in the parable Christ made it clear that He would have to depart this world and be gone for a considerable period. Then He would return to earth, not as a prince expecting a kingdom, but as a

king to set up His throne. While He was absent His servants were to use the capital with which He had entrusted them and to increase it by trading. In the meantime, His enemies would rage and struggle in rebellion against His imminent rule.

The picture of Christ's receiving the Kingdom is aptly set forth in the fifth chapter of Revelation. Christ alone was found worthy to open the book sealed with seven seals, which will contain the title deed of the earth. In this book we have a foreview of events showing the Lion of the Tribe of Judah's assuming dominion over the earth. He will take the book out of the hand of the Father who sits on the throne, and then proceed to open it. Therefore, Christ even yet is not actually king, but waits in expectation of a throne. He will assume this throne upon His return to earth.

It will be noticed that the number of servants to whom the nobleman gave the pounds was ten. Ten is the ordinal number of perfection. It is a number symbolizing completeness. The beast of Revelation had ten horns. There were Ten Commandments, ten lost tribes of Israel, and ten virgins in the *Parable of the Coming of the Bridegroom.*

Therefore, the number ten indicated all of the servants of the nobleman. All of his servants were given a responsibility. The gifts were the same in each case and might be considered to be of small value. The lord himself said that a pound was only "a very little" (Verse 17).

What does this pound represent? Some say it speaks of eternal life. But eternal life is not increased by trading. The pound undoubtedly represents the commission which Jesus committed to His disciples ere He departed from them. The disciples were to go forth and bear fruit, and that fruit was to remain.

The disciples' task of carrying the word of their testimony does not seem great in the eyes of the world. In fact, the pound appeared to be very small. But though witnessing is a small thing in the world's sight, it is the means of obtaining something infinitely great.

But we notice another truth imparted by the parable. The enemies of the nobleman during his absence started a rebellion in an attempt to frustrate his purpose in becoming king over the land:

> "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14).

Who are these citizens who sent this message? It is, of course the Jews who rejected Him. Christ came of the tribe of Judah, and is in that sense a Jew. It is a sad fact that the Scripture records that "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The hatred of the Jews for Christ is seen not only in their crucifixion of the Lord, but in their hatred for His servants, in their persecution beginning with the death of Stephen and countless other disciples of the Lord whom they martyred. It was as they cried to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar."

Not only Jews but Gentiles have refused to acknowledge the right of Christ to rule. The world powers will not have Him to be their king. The prince of the power of the air, even Satan, who inspires the hearts of men and women to rebel against His authority claims the kingdoms of this world (Luke 4:5-6).

The time came at last for the king to return. Having received the kingdom, he then took an account of his servants:

> "And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading" (Luke 19:15).

It is to be noted that the same nobleman who went away in person returned in person. So it is with Christ. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). So declared the two men in white. He went away visibly. He will return visibly.

But we note that the absence of the Lord was to be for a considerable period of time. One servant who excelled in his work had time for his pound to gain ten pounds. The long delay was to have a varied effect upon the servants. Some used the time to the very best advantage, to increase their stewardship. Others were careless in carrying out their responsibility. But whether they were prepared or unprepared to give a good accounting, they all had to come into the presence of the king, at the time of his return. And here we see that the rewards of God's people are not given out at their death, but at the coming of Christ.

The first man to come before the king could say, "Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." The master then replied in words of praise, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful

in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). This man represents that class of followers of Christ who receive the highest reward. He was active and faithful to the very limit of his ability. He can be reckoned among the 100-fold Christians, and he will rule and reign with Christ during the millennium.

There was a second servant who was called forward and he said, "Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds." The Lord said to him, "Be thou also over five cities." This man was a good man, though he did not attain unto the first. He was content with the smaller achievements. He had not put the same zeal and sacrifice into his work as the first had done. He did not receive the same praise the first had received; nevertheless, he received a reward in proportion to his efforts.

Of the ten servants, only two were represented as receiving rewards. But between the two are many variations. There are seven servants of whom no mention is made. But in every case we may understand that the reward is in proportion to the service. Different degrees of faithfulness will receive varying degrees of reward.

Yet it is to be noticed that the reward is not spoken of as some material gain or as some possession to be received by the servant, or certain property to be henceforth held as exclusively his own, but rather the reward consists of enlarged service. Those who are faithful will participate in the rule of an empire, the increase of which shall know no end. This is one of the great revelations of Christ. The end of service in this age will not mean a dreamy unrealistic paradise of the future, but a service vastly extended in the great Kingdom of God, which is shortly to be revealed. The Lord is developing a royal priesthood; He is choosing kings (Rev. 1:6) who will rule and reign with Him in the age to come (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:6).

We see, therefore, that the Christian's work, aside from its value to the Lord at the present time, is a sort of training school to give experience for much greater things to come. When our work is finished here, we shall be transferred to a new Kingdom to take part in the administration of the affairs of the world to come. We can only speculate about the glory of that great work. We know that the enlarged scope of our service to God will mean that we shall be given a vastly increased faculty to work. Satan will be bound and conflict with evil will have been ended. The servant will truly enter into the joy of the Lord.

But against this wonderful prospect there is set over against

it the darkness and woe of a rejected servant who has refused to serve God:

Since so much space is given to this third servant, we ought to notice the circumstances carefully. It will be noticed that the man addressed the returning king as "lord," which meant that he acknowledged him as master and sovereign. The unfaithful servant was orthodox and proper in his salutation. He handed the lord his pound done up in a napkin. The napkin had the same purpose as a handkerchief, and one of its uses was to wipe away the sweat of hard labor from the brow. Since the man was not using the napkin, it is evident that he had not been working. This man told the lord he had kept his pound tied up in a napkin, that is he had hidden his testimony and had given himself over to a life of idleness and ease. The proper investment of the lord's pound required industry, wisdom, zeal, and activity. But the servant had been indolent, and to justify himself of his idleness he said to his lord: "I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layest not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow."

It would seem that the man had a very unjust conception of his lord. Yet that is exactly the view held by thousands of professed believers today. They profess Christianity only through fear. Their conception of the Master is that of an exacting and demanding person. They are given to much questioning. They wonder about the justice of God. Why should Christians be required to give up the world? Why should there be a judgment? Why does God permit this to happen or that to happen to His people? These kinds of thoughts cause their souls to be filled with darkness and dread and paralyze their will for service.

There are thousands of professed believers in the church today who fit the above description. They are so filled with fear that they are utterly useless in the church. They contribute nothing to the cause of Christ and are a stumbling block to new converts. Their testimony for Christ is never heard, for they do not believe that it will do any good, and indeed in the spirit they are in it would not do any good.

This disobedient servant was without excuse. He could have at least given his money to the bankers and allowed it to draw interest. If he did not have faith and initiative to work by himself, he should have cooperated and helped someone who was stronger in the service. But since the man had wrapped up his pound in a napkin and lived in idleness, he lost his reward. He was stripped

of all he had and it was given to him who had ten pounds. What terrible thoughts there will be in eternity to recall the missed opportunity. Oh, the deceitfulness of sin! How it deludes men until they not only become enemies of God, but enemies to themselves. At the coming of Christ the state and position of a man is fixed forever. There is no prospect for this slothful man of a greater sphere of activity, or a greater joy in the future. The sentence passed was a solemn one. "For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him."

So it is even in this life. Talents which are used grow in value and usefulness. That which is not used deteriorates and decays.

We must add this final thought. It appears that many people feel that what they have is small and insignificant. Therefore, they do nothing. They neglect what seems to them the small opportunities that are all around them. When asked to perform a service in the church, they think it is of such little value that they turn it down. Alas for them! What a rude awakening they will have on that day when they must give an accounting to the Master.

There is the final class, spoken of as citizens who said, "We will not have this man reign over us." Vengeance overtakes the openly defiant and rebellious. Though Christ is a loving and merciful Saviour, He faithfully depicts the doom of the wicked. It was Christ who warned men to fear not "them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:4-5). The words of Christ have reference to the great day of God's wrath.

We shall not dwell on the doom of the wicked. There is nothing in the words of Jesus to give a single ray of hope for this class. There will be a terrible and irrevocable separation of the righteous from the wicked.

Who are those that the king calls in to slay the wicked? They are, of course, the angels who are the appointed executioners and to whom is committed the task of administering judgment to the disobedient. Those who will not be ruled by grace must ultimately feel the wrath of God.

Yet even as the parable gives a fearsome warning to the disobedient, it at the same time gives words of encouragement to the faithful that in due time a reward awaits them. As the apostle Paul says, "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (I Cor. 3:8).

Chapter 35

The Talents

> "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey" (Matt. 25:14-15).

A superficial reading might give the impression that the parable *of the Talents* and the *Parable of the Pounds* were almost the same, or at least teach the same thing. It is true that there are several points of similarity, but a close reading shows that the *Parable of the Talents* has much that is not touched upon by the first. Let us notice some of the points of difference:

1. The two parables were spoken at different times. The first was told to both disciples and enemies; the second was told only to disciples.

2. In the first, the servants were given pounds; in the second they received talents.

3. The value of the first was small—only a few dollars. The talents, however, were worth thousands of dollars.

4. In the first parable, the one who gave the pounds was a nobleman. In the second, the one who gave the talents was spoken of as a man who travelled into a far country.

5. In the first, each servant received a pound; in the second the servants received talents according to their several abilities.

6. In the first, each was rewarded according to the number that his pounds had increased. In the second, they were rewarded on the basis of faithfulness.

7. In the first, the parable dealt with both rebels and servants. In the second, only servants are mentioned.

There are other points of difference; but we have mentioned

enough to show that although in some respects the parables have a resemblance, there is also a considerable difference in them. Actually one parable supplements the other.

The *Parable of the Talents,* as we have noted was, in contrast to the one of the Pounds spoken exclusively to disciples. Jesus was in Jerusalem and had been rejected. The disciples standing about the temple drew His attention to the beauty of its stones. The Lord replied to their inquiry by saying that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed and the temple thrown down, an event that took place 40 years later. The disciples confused this event with His Second Coming, as some still do today. Christ's statement led the disciples to ask three questions: one, as to the *time* of His coming, and the others as to the *signs* of His coming. Jesus replied to all the questions. The giving of the parable was a partial answer to the time.

As we have noted, there are some things taught in the *Parable of the Talents* which are also portrayed in the *Parable of the Pounds.* We shall try to avoid repetition as far as possible.

There is one special point that belongs to both parables which Jesus obviously sought to call to their attention—that there was to be a long lapse of time between His First Coming and His Second Coming. This was brought out in two statements. First, the man was to travel into a far country; and second, He was to be gone a long time (Verse 19). At our point of vantage we know that Christ has been gone a long time—over 1900 years. Had those of the Early Church carefully studied the parable, they would have known that Christ's coming was not immediate, as many of them supposed (II Thess. 2:1-2).

The man in this parable, like the one in the *Parable of the Pounds,* without question is Jesus Christ. He went into a far country which answers to heaven, where He was seated at the right hand of God. Before leaving, He called His servants to Him and "delivered unto them his goods"—to one five talents, to another two talents, and to another one, to each according to his several abilities. Then the servants took the talents and began to put them to work. The first with his five talents, gained five more. The second with two talents gained two more, while the third took his talent and buried it in the earth.

> "Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained another two.

But he that had received one went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money" (Matt. 25:16-18).

While the pounds represented only a few dollars, the talents had a value of many thousands of dollars, which would indicate the master was a man of wealth. Thus in the *Parable of the Pounds* Christ is seen in His earthly poverty, having nothing to give His disciples but His Word which they were to carry into the world. But the Word without the heavenly treasure (the Holy Spirit) is not complete. After Christ returned to heaven, He resumed His riches and wealth. He received the Spirit from the Father and gave gifts unto men (Acts 2:33; Ephes. 4:7-8). The talents, therefore, represent the power and gifts of the ministry that Christ gave to His Church.

It is important to note that these talents have reference to supernatural impartation rather than the human abilities—although it is to be noted that the talents were given in proportion to "his several ability." Everyday observation and experience shows us that while God gives His gifts to His humblest servants, individual capacity is involved in their reception. Human ability by itself, manifested in pride, can make impossible the proper use of the gifts. Nevertheless, sanctified human ability working in cooperation with the Spirit of God accomplishes the greatest good. Paul's remarkable natural endowments after he was anointed with the power of the Holy Ghost made him the greatest figure in the New Testament next to Christ Himself.

And thus we see that Christ delivered His talents to His disciples in varying measures according to their "several ability (ies)." That is the law both of the spiritual and of the natural world. Moreover, if we do not develop what abilities and talents we have in the service of the Lord in this life, we shall not be competent to discharge the added responsibilities in the world to come. Yet in a real sense, we cannot take pride in our own abilities. As the apostle Paul said, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Natural abilities come from God even as spiritual gifts do. But one is earthly and the other heavenly. So in either case, we must give God all the glory; and if He has given us more than He has to another, we should be humbly grateful.

What are the talents? Do they not represent the gifts of the Spirit as mentioned in I Corinthians 12? These gifts have many manifestations and operations. They operate proportionately according to the person's faith and the measure of grace given (Rom.

12:3). Jesus said to certain ones who came for healing: "According to your faith be it unto you." Gifts are given to persons in proportion to their faith and their natural capacities to receive.

We find that although the pounds were given to each man in the same measure, not so are the talents. One received five talents, and another two, still another only one. When it comes to gifts and ministries, there is a great diversity both in capacity and opportunities in God's service. Each was given the number of talents which their natural capacities could best use. But in any case, the talents were not to be spent for personal advantages, but for the purpose of enriching the master. The first two, as wise stewards began to trade and invest the money and gradually increased that which the master had put in their hands. The third servant, however, went out and dug in the earth and hid the lord's money.

Now the time came at last when the lord of the servants returned and reckoned with them:

> "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:19-21).

We notice the difference between the *Parable of the Pounds* and the *Parable of the Talents* in the matter of the rewards. The man whose pound gained ten was made ruler of ten cities while he whose pound gained five was made ruler of only five cities. But in the case of the talents, he whose five gained five and he whose two gained two received the same reward. For he spoke the same words to both of them. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

In this parable Jesus was teaching another truth than that in the *Parable of the Pounds*. Men were not to be rewarded on the basis of how much God gave them in the first place. For a man has nothing to boast of because God has given him more than he has given another man. The reward is in the degree of faithfulness. Equal faithfulness brings equal reward. Each will enter into the joy of the Lord.

What is the joy of the Lord? Who can plumb the infinite meaning of these words? But we may say that whatever it will mean to Christ Himself it will mean to His faithful servants. As a wife shares the wealth and possessions of her husband, so the Bride of Christ will enter into the Bridegroom's joy and be co-heir with Him in all things.

Indeed the parable seems to teach that the mother who is faithful in all things in her home, the Sunday school teacher who is faithful at her post, the pastor who is faithful to his flock, all will share alike in the Bridegroom's joy. The key word is faithfulness. But alas, as we shall see, there is a grave danger that the one who has been given a smaller field of labor, being disappointed in what was allotted to him, may become slothful in carrying out his responsibility.

This we see in the case of the man who received one talent and who went and hid it in the earth. As the napkin which hid the pound was a symbol, so is the earth where it was hidden. There are earthly pleasures, earthly possessions, earthly ambitions, earthly friendships which can, and often do, cover up the talents God has given. He who has a talent that can be used for God and is letting it lie idle is covering it up.

Perhaps there is a person who has an excellent voice, but worldly ambitions attract his attention and the talent is used for selfish purposes instead. Another is called to the ministry; and though he might be a great soul winner, the sacrifice involved seems too great, and so the talent is buried and is of no use to his Lord.

But the time comes when a reckoning must be made. What will the man do with his talent? The slothful servant had explanations. He defended himself by reflecting against his lord's character:

> "Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine" (Matt. 25:24-25).

It would seem that the servant was rudely presumptuous to make these remarks about his lord. But he went on and said that he was afraid. His own bad conscience took away his faith, and he was afraid. The demon of fear took control of him and he did the worst thing he could have done. He took the lord's money and hid it in the earth. There are those who are afraid to take God

at His Word. They are afraid to use their talents for God—afraid to do what God had told them to do. The fact that the man had received only one talent was not to account for his failure on the day of reckoning. His character is the single explanation of what he did. Because a man has few talents does not indicate in any way that he will not be commended. All that is required at that day is faithfulness.

Perhaps a warning is in order here that men guard against a misinterpretation of slender gifts. The test of faithfulness can be made equally well if one has few gifts as if he has many. The widow who had two mites and cast them into the treasury of the Lord, received the Lord's commendation, when He said, "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all . . . but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:3-4).

In the unprofitable servant we see the terrible sin of doing nothing. It is to be observed that the man was not charged with committing some gross act of wickedness. True enough, if neglect alone brings condemnation, how much more condemnation will fall upon those who live a life of vice? Truly the wrath of God is a fearful thing to consider.

But this man was guilty of having hard thoughts about God. When the time came for him to make an accounting he was unable to give an explanation of his conduct. Indeed his words were irrational and incoherent. In his panic he accused the lord of "reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed." The man in his folly was taking the lord to task, when in reality he was the one on trial. Such a defense seems incredible, yet it is excuses like this that people give when they are asked why they are not using their talents for God.

But then came the verdict. The talent that the slothful servant had was taken from him and given to him who had ten talents. Because of his sloth, he forfeited his gift. This principle is true in both material and spiritual spheres. If an arm or a limb is not used, the muscles weaken and atrophy. Powers that are not employed wither away.

But if we fail to avail ourselves of our privileges, it does not mean that no one else will. When Judas fell, another took his vacated office. When Israel rejected her opportunity and position of glory, God turned to the Gentiles. It is a solemn thing to realize that the unfaithful servant never awakes to his danger until his gift is lost forever. No opportunity afterward to redeem himself was given.

What happened to the unprofitable servant? The talent that he had was taken from him and he was cast into the outer darkness:

> "Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:28-30).

We are told that this unfaithful servant was cast out from the presence of the Lord. He is described as "wicked and slothful" and "unprofitable." Jesus said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away . . . If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Some see the wicked and slothful servant as a saved man. But what is told of his final estate is not encouraging. The man was cast into the outer darkness, hardly a description of the fate of the righteous. The final word is, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Oh, what pangs of remorse must beset the unfaithful servant when the time of reckoning comes! What desperate regrets when the terrible realization comes that it is too late to mend one's ways. Henry Calderwood in his *Parables of the Lord* puts it well when he says:

> "He who will not live as a faithful servant of the Lord must be an outcast from His presence . . . . But when the inevitable separation becomes a reality in personal experience there will be no heart so dulled to sensibility as to escape overwhelming anguish. A willful refusal of service involves God's rejection of the servant. A fruitless life closes in fruitless remorse, from which there is no escape, outer darkness bearing witness to exclusion from Divine favor and subjection to Divine wrath."

Part 7:

Jesus Tells of the Hereafter

Jesus Tells of the Hereafter

A subject of most powerful interest to every member of the human race is that of life after death. Are the dead conscious? If so, under what conditions? The truth is that the great majority of people, Christians or otherwise, believe in immortality—that is, life beyond the grave—although opinions concerning it vary greatly. As a matter of fact, the Bible is the only authoritative guide to life in the next world. On this subject, it gives an unqualified answer declaring that consciousness continues in the next world. Christ said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). Man is more than a body; he has a soul, and Jesus is telling us that the soul does not cease to exist when the body dies.

The Scriptures clearly teach that the believer, at the death of his body, goes to paradise, which is in the presence of Christ. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8).

Science has proven that neither matter nor energy can be annihilated. Matter can change its form only. Likewise, life which is a higher form than matter, cannot be removed from existence. Where, then, does the spirit of the unsaved go after death? What does it experience? What is its destiny?

Of this, many people are not certain. Does the sinner go to heaven or paradise? Heaven is a holy place, and a guilty sinner would hardly find himself in harmony with its holiness. Where then will he go? Common logic must conclude that he will go where other unsaved persons go. Like attracts like in the spiritual world. And to this the Bible agrees. At death the spirit of the unsaved gravitates to where the other unsaved are. The Bible refers to this place as Hades.

This part, *Jesus Tells of the Hereafter,* shows us what the Bible has to say about Hades. Jesus Himself discussed the subject, and while He did not go into detail, He did give us all the essential facts about Hades. His words are surely a warning to make "our calling and election sure."

Chapter 36

The Rich Fool

> "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:16-20).

This parable was occasioned as the result of a request by one of his hearers that concerned the estate of his family. "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). The Scriptures do not give us the full details of the incident. We do not know whether his brother actually cheated him, or whether he had a mind to do his brother wrong. The law gave the elder brother a double portion of the estate, and it may be that he would have had Christ to alter the law and oblige his brother to divide the inheritance equally with him. At any rate the Lord rebuked him and said, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" He had come to assist men to secure their heavenly inheritance, and the man was only interested in the earthly and material things. Jesus wanted him to know that the Kingdom of God is not of this world and that it does not interfere in civil matters. It does not meddle with civil rights, nor does it encourage us to expect worldly advantages because of our religion.

Here Christ foreshadowed the truth that Christianity and communism would have nothing in common. Communism's chief lure is its promise to divide this world's inheritance—it will take from the rich and give to the poor. It will see that the masses

share equally of this world's reward—although time has shown that the claim is a fraud, a mere pretense to obtain unlimited power for communist agitators.

When communism takes over a government, the selfish natures of those in power seize the wealth of the land to promote their own advantage. The people continue to receive the minimum, while the wealth of the nation is mobilized to maintain great armaments for the purpose of threatening or overpowering other nations.

Jesus then took occasion to teach a lesson to His hearers:

> "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Jesus is saying, "Our happiness and comfort do not depend upon our having a great deal of this world's goods." The creature comforts of this world do not meet the needs of the soul, nor satisfy its true desires. Many live very contentedly with but little material wealth; and on the other hand, others live very miserably although they have much of this world's goods.

Jesus illustrates His words with the *Parable of the Rich Fool.* It is a picture of a worldly-minded man whose ground brought forth plentifully, insomuch that he had no room to store his fruits. Instead of thanking God for his prosperity, he was concerned only about preserving his increasing wealth. He speaks to himself as one filled with perplexity. The abundance of the wealthy does not suffer them to sleep. The rich man's question was, "What shall I do?"

There seems to have been no thought in his mind to help the poor, the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow. He wanted to put it all in his own barns, to hoard it up for the years to come. He made a decision that he would pull down his barns and build bigger ones:

> "And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:18-19).

It is to be noted that the Scriptures do not condemn the man simply for his business plan. He is not said to be especially wicked, or that he is a deceiver or oppressor of the helpless. Nor does the parable strike at the fact that honorable industry will bring a reward.

The parable notes that the man was concerned only with himself. He was a complacent worldling who thought that the even flow of his prosperity was going on forever. He bade his soul to rely on the "much goods laid up for many years." He intended to eat, drink, and be merry. In the philosophy of the rich fool, the center of the universe was himself, and the range of his thoughts were the physical pleasures of his body, and no other provision was necessary. Thus he lived on a plane not much higher than that of the animals in his barnyard.

But the unexpected happened. On that same day, a sentence of death was passed upon him. God spoke and said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

But of this the farmer yet knew nothing. That day he stepped out into the fields; he gave his orders to his servants. Certain ones in the building trade were called in, and plans were discussed and preparations made to set in motion the work of tearing down the old barns and the building of the new ones. Throughout the day he proceeded with his planning, little dreaming that he would never see the sun rise again.

Finally it was night. He retired to his bed. His mind was full of thoughts and schemes of what he would do on the morrow. So preoccupied with these things was he that he did not hear the rustling of the wings of Death as he entered his room. Suddenly the man trembled, then with a great shudder he lay very still. Just that quickly it happened. Was it a heart attack? We do not know. At any rate his heart ceased beating and the man was no longer living.

What of this poor worldling as he felt his soul slipping out into eternity? Did a thought flash through his mind of his spiritual destitution, of his unpreparedness to meet God? The rich man was totally unprepared. If he thought of his barns and his riches, he suddenly realized in that instant that they had all been taken away from him. He heard the fateful decree, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

When morning came his servants found him cold in death. What were all his goods to him then? To whom would his broad acres go? The once rich man gave no commands; nor was his advice asked. He was given a few square feet in the corner of a field—the place of the dead. Time had ended for him; only eternity remained.

Where is the rich man who thought that all that mattered were goods and larger barns? This parable does not carry the scene forward any further. His destiny, however, is revealed in Luke 16 in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. He was in hades. There is no wealth in this region of night, no comfort—not even a drink of water—only anguish and despair and the memory of selfish acts and forgotten opportunities.

The occurrence as described in this parable is a common one and chronicled regularly in the daily press. A strong man without the slightest warning bowed himself and died. Even while his riches flowed to his garner, life ebbed away.

And so the man who was rich had no possessions. The earthly ones were gone, and there were no spiritual ones to be discovered. And thus did Jesus conclude, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Clearly, the rich man might have prepared other things. Had he used his wealth for others he might have harvested certain precious fruits of the Spirit. There were store-places, ready-made in the homes of the poor, in the ever-present need of forlorn humanity. But this would have meant that he would be of an unselfish spirit, whereas, he was covetous and centered everything about himself. He believed that charity was to end where it began—strictly at home. His favorite pronoun was the possessive—*my* corn, *my* goods, *my* barns, *my* soul.

What a contrast there was between the man's own views and the divine decree. He talked of many years; God said, "This night." The farmer considered himself as having much goods; God declared him bankrupt. The rich man fancied he had great foresight; divine decree declared him a fool. He spoke of his soul as his own; God said, "This night thy soul shall be required," for the purpose of weighing it in the balance.

Chapter 37

Lazarus and the Rich Man

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is not a parable in the usual sense. A parable is an analogy between visible things and invisible things. Here we have a direct statement about invisible things themselves. Jesus says, ". . . There was a certain rich man" (Luke 16:19). We must, therefore, believe there was a certain rich man.

That Jesus chose two individuals, one a man of wealth, and the other a friendless beggar, to illustrate what happens to men after death is deeply significant. It is notable that the rich man was not accused of committing a single sin. He is not said to have been vicious. In the eyes of the world he was no doubt considered a successful man. It is not hinted that his riches were ill-gotten; and his wealth, likely, was considered by some as an indication of divine favor. Dives (for so tradition gives his name) had everything this world had to offer. He was clothed in purple and fine linen and was able to indulge in every bodily comfort and luxury. He enjoyed what men call the good things of life.

It may be interesting to consider for a moment the kind of life that the wealthy of his day enjoyed. Who was considered rich in those days? It is likely that were the average person living today to be transported back to the time in which the rich man lived, he would not consider his possessions anything to be particularly coveted. For example, in that time there were no automobiles, which are a necessity by every standard today. The only means of land locomotion available would be either by means of a horse or a camel. If one traveled by sea, it had to be by sail boat with facilities exceedingly primitive. Automobile and air travel are only two of a large number of conveniences we consider indispensable to living in our day, but which, of course, were then unknown.

However, the rich man probably did have one of the most luxuriously appointed homes of his times. The description Jesus gives of him indicates that he spared neither care nor expense to

give himself the best that was obtainable in his day for comfort and convenience. The wealthy of those times furnished their homes with custom-made furniture, richly upholstered couches, luxurious carpets, costly curtains made of imported silk. The silverware was of the finest kind.

A rare convenience of those times was running water in the house. As for baths, only the most affluent could provide such a luxury. The rich man perhaps boasted one. Instead of paintings hung in frames, it was the custom among many of the wealthy to have murals painted. That is, the artist would perform his work right on the interior walls of the house. At strategic places there would be niches set back in the partitions designed to hold wick lamps. As for the floors, it was not uncommon for the homes of the rich to be surfaced with mosaic tiles laid in artistic patterns.

To operate a rich man's estate, it was necessary to employ a number of menservants and womenservants to keep up the grounds, to look after the appointments of wealth, prepare and serve the sumptuous feasts. Jesus mentions that the rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen. The word *purple* is derived from the dye and was highly prized in those days. Actually, the name *Canaan* means "the land of purple." *Phoenicia* means "red purple." This color was obtained from a secretion of the mollusk. Various kinds of mollusks produced the different shades. The darker color was considered the superior. Historical evidence indicates that Israel largely imported this product. Tyre, which was on the sea where the mollusks were obtainable, was one of its chief manufacturers. Likewise was Syria to the north. "Syria was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of the wares of thy making: they occupied in thy fairs with emeralds, *purple,* and broidered work, and fine linen, and coral, and agate" (Ezek. 27:16).

Various references in the Scriptures indicate that purple garments were considered a sign of distinction, royalty, and wealth. Herod dressed Jesus in purple in an attempt to mock His claim to being King of the Jews.

> "And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe . . . Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the *purple* robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man" (John 19: 2, 5).

The phrase "clothed in fine linen and purple" was a way of saying that a man enjoyed great wealth.

Jesus added that the rich man "fared sumptuously every day." The great problem of the masses in ancient times was to obtain

sufficient food, especially during the times of nature's vicissitudes. When there were drouths or floods, the people suffered severely. In some cases, whole populations were decimated by famines. One such famine in the land of Israel in the days of the apostles was anticipated by Agabus, the prophet, and is recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 11:27-30). Although it affected the world, it was of special severity in the Jerusalem area, and Christians who lived in Antioch "determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea."

The rich man was fortunate. He did not share the struggles of the common people. Being a connoisseur of fine foods, it was his custom to have a gourmet's spread. His friends and associates who were invited to these great banquets, no doubt looked forward to them with eager anticipation.

Incidentally, Jesus spoke in another place of a "certain rich man" whose ground brought forth plentifully. It is possible that Christ was referring to this same rich man. At any rate, what Jesus had to say about this person who was a land proprietor on a large scale throws light on the thinking and attitude of the rich of that day. From what is said, the character and habits of the principals of the two incidents were essentially the same.

We might note in passing that Israel at that time was an agricultural nation, and its chief source of wealth was in the land. Let us, therefore, note what Jesus had to say about this rich farmer:

> "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

This rich man's land brought forth plentifully; so that in the course of time his storehouses were unable to accommodate the fruits gathered from his prolific harvests. He could have enlarged his granaries to take care of the surplus, but it occurred to him that new buildings would better suit his purpose. He decided to pull

down his old barns and build larger and more commodious storehouses.

Anticipating the accomplishment of his purpose, he envisioned the years ahead when he would enjoy his leisure, spending his time in banqueting with his wealthy friends. Putting his thoughts into words, he said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

But, alas, the rich man's dreams were not to materialize. The sands of time had already run out for him. God called him a fool and declared that on that very night his soul would be required—"Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

The fatal flaw in the character of the rich man was that he lived solely for this world and showed little or no interest in the one that was to come. He acted as if life on this earth were to be an unending thing.

Lazarus the Beggar

As we return to the original narrative, we find that Jesus introduces another character whose name is Lazarus. This man, a beggar, lay at the rich man's gate, diseased, hungry, in rags, and desiring the crumbs which fell from his table. He was brought there not at the request of the rich man, but under pressure of great want. He lay in rags, exposed to the weather, covered with sores, his body wasting away. The rich man had ample opportunity to observe the sad condition of the beggar each time he passed through his gate. How much Lazarus received from him we are not told. The inference is that he was given merely the crumbs left over from the daily feasts. Only the dogs of the city seemed to have shown sympathy for him, and as they passed by, they licked his sores.

There was, however, one hopeful ray in the sad picture. The man's name was Lazarus, which signifies "God my help." The poor beggar, deserted by man and left to perish from hunger and disease, looked to a hope beyond this world. His trust was in God. He saw something beyond the grave. Death eventually came to the beggar and mercifully relieved his suffering and misery.

Up to this point Jesus relates an incident that appears to have no relevance to our subject; but now the significance is seen. It lies in the fact that Jesus continues the narrative beyond the point where all human biographers must stop. In so doing, He reveals what happens on the other side of time. He lifts the veil of the mystery of death and shows that this event did not mark the end

for either the rich man or Lazarus. The spirits of both men immediately went to an abode. However, we are informed *that their respective spheres were separated by a "great gulf."*

Lazarus Carried By The Angels

In narrating the events at Lazarus' departure, from the earth life Jesus shows us that the moment the spirit left the body of Lazarus, angels received it and tenderly carried it to paradise. (Abraham's bosom is the name used by Jesus to denote paradise.)

This disclosure that the angels convey the departed spirits of the righteous to paradise is not surprising. The Old Testament Scriptures clearly reveal that angels encamp around them that fear Him and deliver them (Psa. 34:7). Jesus Himself declared that angels are given charge over those that put their trust in Him.

> "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven *their angels* do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

Whether or not an angel is present every moment of a believer's life, it is certain angels are nearby at the moment of his death. It is a well-known circumstance that many persons at the time of their passing have given testimony to seeing angels.

It is indeed a comforting thought that at the moment when death comes for the righteous, angels are present to take the spirit and to convey it safely to its proper place. Lazarus was the lowest on the scale as far as human society was concerned. He was only a poor despised beggar. Nonetheless, not one angel, but several, were present at his death to convey his spirit to the comfort and peace of Abraham's bosom.

(We have not space in this volume to consider Lazarus further and to note what he found in paradise nor to explain that Christ at the time of His ascension took paradise from hades and moved it up to the third heaven. We recommend that the reader secure the companion book which describes paradise, entitled ***Paradise—Abode of the Righteous Dead.***)

Chapter 38

The Death of the Rich Man

As a person of wealth, it was expected that the rich man would provide himself with a sepulcher. Yet as many people do today, he apparently thought of death in a sort of detached way. Folk buy a cemetery lot, burial insurance, make a will, but they do it as a matter of custom and not as one who must themselves face death soon. Life seems to them to go on very much the same day after day. Death is for others—not for them—or at least it seems so far off that it is not a matter about which to be concerned.

Since it was a custom to provide a family tomb, the rich man no doubt took care of this matter. What kind of tomb would he choose? It would likely be a sepulcher hewed out of the side of some hill where there were rocky outcroppings. It was a general rule that the sepulcher be located some distance outside the city. The reason for the distance was the belief in the defiling effect of contact with the dead (Lev. 21:1; Nu. 6:6; 19:13).

Those who could afford it constructed expensive sepulchers. It was a mark of distinction to own a sepulcher that outranked that of other citizens. To hew a tomb out of a rock was a costly operation, but that kind of sepulcher would endure for many centuries; whereas, graves dug in soft earth might collapse as the result of erosion or earthquake.

The tombs of the wealthy sometimes had several chambers with openings from one room to another in a kind of family vault. While the poor and even the well-to-do usually had the bodies of their loved ones wrapped in a winding sheet, as was the case of *Lazarus* (brother of Mary and Martha), those who had the means often had in addition a sarcophagus prepared for the interment of the body. This might be carved out of the rock itself, or it could be a coffin made of marble. In some cases the walls of the sepulcher were richly decorated with brightly colored paintings. As for the more expensive tombs, there was often a small courtyard outside

the entrance. In the case of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, whose tomb was used to inter the body of Christ, there was a small garden located on the outside area.

While we do not know exactly in what kind of tomb the rich man was buried, it is quite probable that he spared no expense to make it a place in keeping with his means and station in life.

Death has a way of seeming a long way off. We are not told that the rich man died a premature death. He had all the comforts of life that money could buy. It may well be that he lived out his years. He did outlive Lazarus who, exposed to the elements and malnutrition became the victim of evil sores, which finally culminated in his early demise.

Yet, inevitably the hour came when the rich man must die. The arts of the physicians were unable to slow the pace of advancing age. At length a sickness which was to have a fatal termination befell the rich man. The time had come of which Solomon spoke in Ecclesiastes 12:1-5:

> "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain; In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

Could one have dropped in upon the rich man in his last hours, it would not have been a pleasant scene. There is nothing cheerful about death. And those whose treasures consist only of what they have in this world find nothing to comfort nor reassure them in the hour when their earthly residence comes to an end. The time had come when the rich man had to face that which comes to all the sons of men—the grim reality of death.

When news came that he was sinking, the five brethren, of course, gathered at his bedside. No matter how accustomed we become to death, it is always a sobering moment when we see

someone whom we have known for a long time about to be taken from us. At such a time people are prone to encourage the dying, telling him he will soon recover, even though they know that it cannot be.

When the rich man realized that he was about to die, he naturally asked himself the question that he had not asked before: "What will death do to me?" Somehow this adventure into the unknown has little appeal. In many cases it brings a deep fear. The thought of being placed in the cold earth is in fact terrifying to some. Man struggles against his enemy death, but there is no court of appeal to whom one can turn when the Grim Reaper calls. And so the inevitable moment came when the rich man closed his eyes and gave a final shudder.

The word of his passing went out. The whole city took notice as any community does when one of its prominent citizens dies. The professional mourners were called and began their mercenary wailing. The brothers were sad. Their sorrow was perhaps mitigated somewhat by the thought that their brother's estate probably would be divided among them.

The amenities of death must be observed. Because the family was wealthy, it was likely that the body was embalmed. Ordinary people could not afford this luxury, but wealth is able to secure the best that there is on earth. The embalming process completed, the hour was set for the final rites. A prominent rabbi would deliver the eulogy to the distinguished audience that was present to pay their last respects to the deceased.

The ceremony over, the funeral procession began to move toward the sepulcher. Upon reaching it, the body of the great man was taken and placed in the waiting sarcophagus. The final words were said. Then a large stone was moved against the opening, and the human form that for many years had been so familiar to the townspeople was shut off forever from sight.

The rich man was not forgotten at once. The brothers, as well as others, visited the tomb on occasion. The name came up in conversation at times. But gradually folk forgot. Indeed, friends one by one passed through the gate of death as the rich man had. In time the voices of the brothers were stilled. A new generation arose, and then another. Finally, as all others before him, his very name was forgotten as the body turned back into dust. The time came when not one person on earth was left who knew that this rich man had ever lived. The world that he knew and lived for, was dead.

Chapter 39

What the Rich Man Found at Death

Although the angels had received the tired spirit of Lazarus and conveyed it to paradise, nothing is said about their attending the passing of the rich man. He had lived exclusively for this world and could not be bothered about the one to come. Since he showed no interest in making provision for what he knew was certainly coming, he could hardly expect someone else to take care of that for him. Once he scorned the poor beggar lying at his gate. Now he, himself, was a beggar!

Those who reject or ignore God in life deny themselves the presence of angelic attendants at death and instead attract the company of like spirits. Before Judas betrayed Christ, Satan entered into him (John 13:27). Thus the devil was present at the time of Judas' death. Since Satan and his followers are interested in ruining the lives of as many as possible, it is entirely consistent with their purposes to be present at their passing and to lay claim to their spirits when they leave the body.

Does Death End Consciousness?

Materialists declare that death marks the cessation of all consciousness. But what if they are wrong? What if consciousness does survive death? Jesus declared that it does. Man has power to kill the body but not the soul (Matt. 10:28). This is a solemn matter to consider.

The infidels according to their belief contend that all consciousness lies in the physical brain and ceases at death. When the brain dies or disintegrates, that is the end of the human personality, they say. Nevertheless, the evidence provided by recent scientific discoveries quite apart from revelation is against this. Large sections of the brain have been removed by surgeons, and yet consciousness has been retained! The brain obviously is not the personality.

There was a time that men supposed that when a stick of wood was burned, a part of it vanished and was gone forever. In the

course of time, however, when means of accurate measurement of matter in its various forms was developed, it was discovered that the weight of the ash and the gases that passed off in the burning weighed exactly the same as the original piece. Nothing was lost; only the chemical form of the matter was changed.

There was a time when men tried to create energy by means of "perpetual motion" machines. In the Smithsonian Institute there are displayed a large number of contrivances consisting of complicated arrangements of levers, weights, and springs, which theoretically (according to their inventors) should run forever. *None has ever worked.* Man found he could not cheat the law of conversion of energy. In other words, no human can create energy nor destroy energy.

When the atomic age came, it was discovered that certain elements could by means of a chain reaction of its atoms be made to disintegrate partially in an atomic reaction. *But nothing was lost—the matter turned into equivalent energy.* This release of energy, as we all know, was the basis of the atomic bomb.

But matter and energy are not the highest form of substance in this universe. *Life is as much above matter as heaven is above earth.* Man in whom life dwells is the master of matter and energy and is able to cause both to perform according to his will. The psalmist reflecting on human life said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:14).

Man can transform matter to energy and vice versa. But he cannot by any means within his power cause the smallest portion of either to cease to exist. If he cannot create nor destroy these fundamental things of the physical world, *then can it be logically assumed that life, the highest and most mysterious thing in the universe, can be annihilated?* Will not life at the time of physical death of the body pass to another form of existence?

The same conclusion is being reached by many scientists today as was revealed long ago in the Bible—that consciousness survives death.

What Happened to the Rich Man at Death?

Jesus tells us that the rich man, when he passed from the body, found that he was still conscious. That was the grim fact with which he had to reckon. The matter of the continued existence of the spirit after death ceased at once to be an academic question or something for theological speculation. Just as a person born into

this world discovers that he is a member of the human race, so the rich man after leaving the body made the discovery that his spirit still existed, though outside the body. This circumstance no doubt was the first thought that occupied the rich man's attention after death of the body. But only for a moment. The next consideration was how his welfare and future would be affected by the transition.

The rich man after death at once realized that the process of death is irreversible. Living on earth during these many years, physical life seemed to him the only kind of life. But he realized that he had no power whatever to return to earth. All resources on which he had so wholly depended in his lifetime were cut off.

Since death is a one-way passage from this world, Dives' attention was naturally directed to the possibilities the future held for him. Perhaps he had heard that angels attended the death of people dying. Angels certainly were present at the passing of Lazarus who had begged at his gate. But Dives perceived that no angels were there to meet him. There was no guide to direct him in his great hour of need. He remembered the sad look on the face of poor Lazarus, who lay at his gate beseeching an act of mercy that once was in his power to give, but which he withheld. Suddenly, he was the forelorn one, looking for a friendly face but finding none.

The rich man undoubtedly knew something about God. He lived in a land where the Scriptures were read. At funerals he had attended, the rabbis no doubt referred to the resurrection spoken of by the prophets Daniel and Isaiah. At death Jacob knew that there was a place where the fathers who died in the faith were gathered. What did death have to offer him? Would he meet the fathers? Would he see Abraham and converse with him?

The natural law of gravitation operates to hold everything in the physical world to the earth. The human spirit is also subject to that law—it cannot ascend to the heavens without assistance. Therefore, if no angels are present to receive the human spirit, then at death it is attracted downward, just as Christ went down into the heart of the earth at death.

> "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12: 40).

The rich man felt his spirit descending—but to where? Jesus tells us he went to "hades" called in the Old Testament "sheol."

That is the name applied in the Old Testament Scriptures to the abode of the dead.

Marietta Davis' Vision of Paradise and Hades

The Bible makes it clear that the unconverted, those who have died outside of Christ, go to hades at death. Except for what Jesus reveals in the 16th chapter of Luke, the details recorded as to what happens during the moments following death are very few. Many people have had visions of hades, and to a surprising degree their testimonies are in full agreement with the words of Jesus. The writer has read many of these accounts, but in his estimation, Marietta Davis in her book *Scenes Beyond the Grave,* has by far the most detailed and credible description ever given of both paradise and hades. It has been considered a classic by all evangelical denominations. Her description of paradise, the place to which Lazarus went, is most fascinating. The story of her journey down to hades and what she saw there should certainly stir any person to action who has not accepted Christ as his Saviour.

The celestial guide who escorted Marietta to paradise gave her a brief explanation of what happens to a person after he leaves the body. The guide said, "The departure of the spirit from its unsettled and shattered habitation below, worketh no change in its nature." This is a fact that every human being should realize. A view popularly held that death of itself changes a man into a saint is absolutely untrue. Some sermons preached at funerals give the impression that death makes an angel out of a person who has lived a wicked life upon earth. Those who hear this are apt to be lulled into a false security and thus to continue in their state of impenitence. But all who live in their sins must die in their sins. Jesus made this clear to the unbelieving Jews by stating that solemn fact not once, but twice.

> "Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come . . . I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8: 21, 24).

The Sinner Gravitates Into The Regions of Night

Marietta's angel then explained what happens at death. The sanctified and redeemed spirits at death are naturally attracted to

the regions of light. But unsanctified spirits are out of harmony with heaven, and they are attracted to the regions of night. The angel said:

> "All classes as they emerge from physical form are attracted to and mingle with kindred associations, beings to whose character they assimilate. Those of discordant and unhallowed natures are attracted by like elements and enter into regions overhung with clouds of night, while those who for love of good desire pure associations are by heavenly messengers conducted to an orb of glories appearing above the intermediate scene."

Consider the case of two men, still in life, one a devoted Christian, the other a wicked person. They move to a new community. Will not the Christian be attracted to those who, like him, live for and worship God? Is he not happiest when he is among those who sing the songs of the redeemed? But what about the other man? Like attracts like. Perchance he is near a church where worship is in progress. Does he go there? No, he sees nothing there to give him pleasure. Instead he seeks the haunts of men who like himself enjoy that which is unholy.

Death makes no difference in a man's tastes. The unregenerate is attracted to the abode of the unregenerate. Since death does not annihilate the human spirit, it must go some place. It gravitates as a falling object until it reaches and passes through the gates of hades. The magnetic law of evil attraction controls him, and he becomes a victim of this prevailing law.

Chapter 40

The Rich Man in Hades

So it came about that the rich man found himself in hades, a region where the departed human spirits of the unsaved dwell. Let us review the reasons for which the rich man came to this unhappy place:

1. The rich man had lived only for this world and made no provision for the next. He could not say, "God is my help." God helps those that ask for His help.

2. The rich man rejected the call of his conscience. Although a poor sick beggar was at his gate, he had no compassion for him. Dressed in the costliest raiment, he dined daily on the finest and tastiest of foods, unmindful of the wretched mendicant who was dying at his gate from privation and hunger.

3. We may infer that Dives had access to the Scriptures, just as his brethren who were still alive had, but either he did not believe them or else he was just too busy to be bothered (Luke 16:31).

4. It is evident, however, that Dives had some knowledge of the Scriptures. He knew what repentance was (Luke 16:30), but apparently believed that God should perform special miracles in order to get people to repent (Luke 16:31). Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The rich man had not repented; and in that condition he died and went to the abode of the unrighteous dead—not because he had been a rich man, but because he had not repented.

5. Since Dives had made no preparation for the world beyond, why should he expect anyone else to be concerned about what did not interest him. A man of his times, he had his own philosophy of life, and anyone who ventured to speak to him about his soul probably got no thanks for his efforts.

6. Being out of harmony with holy beings and having died in an impenitent state he gravitated to the place to which his nature responded. He could not and would not have been happy in a

place in which sanctified beings dwelt. Dives went as did Judas "to his own place" (Acts 1:25).

So it was that when the rich man arrived in hades, he immediately became aware that no holy beings were in the place to which he had come.

In considering hades at the time of the rich man's death, we must remind the reader that Christ was describing a scene that occurred before His own resurrection. In the Old Testament days even the saints went down to "sheol," or "hades," which is sometimes called "hell" in the King James Version, and sometimes "the grave." Jacob said, "I will go down into the grave [sheol] mourning" (Gen. 37:35).

The wicked also went down to sheol. Those who took part in Korah's rebellion went down to sheol. "They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit [sheol], and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation" (Numbers 16:33). All people in the Old Testament days, whether good or bad, at death went down to sheol. But, and this is all important to understand, *the wicked and righteous were not in the same compartment—there was "a great gulf" fixed between the two classes of people.*

We should add here that after Christ's resurrection, He took captivity captive, removing the righteous from the lower parts of the earth to heaven (Ephes. 4:8-10). So it was that when Paul ascended to paradise some years after the resurrection of Christ, he found paradise located in the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-4). But the scene Christ was describing occurred while paradise (Abraham's bosom) was still in the heart of the earth.

Just as the first moments of a great disaster often leave the victim in a state of shock, so the first hours in hades were undoubtedly for Dives a succession of horrors. A man who throughout his whole life had given himself to the constant seeking of his own comfort and pleasure, now found himself in a place in which there was no comfort. He saw suffering in hades; he saw people moved with remorse. There was nothing there that in any way resembled happiness or even a tolerable existence. He also saw the "great gulf fixed" which made it impossible for him to escape or to cross over into the abode of the righteous. What emotions of despair swept over the one-time rich man, we can only conjecture.

Dives Makes a Desperate Effort to Receive Help

Anyone who meets disaster instinctively seeks assistance. Certainly, entering hades without Christ is a supreme disaster. The rich man would soon have opportunity to converse with Abraham; he also conversed with the doomed spirits on his own side of hades. The information he received from them was certainly nothing to give him any encouragement. Those who had been there a long time had not a single ray of hope to offer. No one ever escaped from there. The thoughts of his former riches which had the power to gratify his slightest whim while on earth only served to mock him.

Nevertheless, when Dives awoke to the realization that he was on the wrong side of hades, he made an effort born of desperation to secure some help from the outside. If only he could talk with Abraham who was the father of the race and who dwelt on the other side of the gulf, he might be able to get some relief or some advice that would help him in his present fearful predicament.

It is not likely that conversation was permitted between the two places except under unusual circumstances. But for some reason, in this case, the veil between the two compartments was permitted to be pushed aside for the moment, and the rich man was able to see both Abraham and the one-time beggar, Lazarus, who had lain at his gate. During his lifetime, Dives would have disdained to condescend to speak to such a miserable and wretched specimen as Lazarus. Only the dogs of the neighborhood had enough compassion on him to seek to alleviate his suffering. Indeed, the rich man probably was highly displeased by such an unprepossessing character as this one lying at his gate. He did, however, apparently give his servants permission to throw the scraps from his ample table to Lazarus to be shared by him and the roving dogs of the neighborhood. Whether or not it was on the basis of this slight service he had performed, Dives became bold enough to ask a favor of Abraham. He whom Dives had once despised would now be a most welcome visitor to the place in which he now abode.

The Conversation Across the Gulf

The reversal in eternity is an appalling thing. The former rich man is now the beggar who in desperation is still seeking help from the one-time mendicant who hovered at his gate. Dives did not swallow his pride to ask this favor, for he no longer had any pride. He had absolutely nothing left for which he could be proud.

When he discovered that he had been given the privilege of speaking with Abraham who was across the gulf in paradise, and seeing Lazarus beside him, he availed himself of the opportunity to make his request! But what is it? Does he ask that he be given an opportunity to enter paradise? No! He realizes only too well that this is impossible. He knows that in his sinful state he is not fitted to live with holy beings. He is out of harmony with the holiness of heaven, and it would increase his sorrow and suffering to be permitted to dwell among the sanctified. He makes no request of Abraham that he enter paradise.

Does he ask for an opportunity to escape from hades? Although by his own testimony it is a place of suffering, he does not request that he be granted permission to leave the place. This too he realizes is impossible. Where could he go? Out into space? To some distant planet? No, he has come to the only place for which he is fitted; it is the only region where there are kindred spirits. There is nothing better for him than to remain in hades. It is significant that any idea of escaping that region has no place in his thoughts. Since it might be his last chance to speak with Abraham, he considers only those things that might have some possibility of being granted.

Being a descendant of Abraham by natural generation, he addresses the patriarch as "father Abraham." The Jews always considered the fact of race to be of great benefit, even assuring them salvation. However, Dives realizes only too well that his nationality cannot and did not prevent his descent into hades. Nevertheless, the first words of his petition are "father Abraham." He thus reminds the patriarch that he is his direct descendant. This he thinks might merit at least a little consideration. And what is his request? It is to ask for mercy. But what kind of mercy? Actually his request is of such insignificance that it seems irrelevant: it is that Lazarus might merely touch the tip of his finger to the cooling fountains of paradise and come and apply it to his burning tongue. This is the most that he dares hope for and certainly it is not much. But alas, even this is denied.

Abraham calls attention to the fact that there is a great gulf fixed between them, and Lazarus is unable to cross over the chasm, even if he wished to do so.

The Great Gulf Fixed

"And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you

cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence" (Luke 16:26).

We must pause a moment and consider the nature of this great gulf that has been fixed between the righteous and the wicked. The statement can only mean that certain laws have been fixed by God that at death will assure the separation of the righteous from the wicked. Just as the law of gravitation in the natural world holds man to a certain location, so there are laws in the spiritual world that direct and hold the righteous to their abode and the wicked to theirs, respectively.

These are wise laws, for those unhappy beings in hades could not enjoy heaven, even though they were permitted entrance. The reason is that their nature is discordant and unstrung by sin and completely out of tune with the harmony and purity of heaven. These people during their earth stay did not realize that their yielding to evil was perverting the very roots of their nature. They did not stop to consider that were they admitted to heaven in their present condition, their sufferings would be intolerable. They would plead to be released to return to the regions of night where at least they would be in harmony with the prevailing element.

In Marietta Davis' famous vision the angel explained this to her saying,

> "Herein is displayed the wisdom and goodness of God. No absolutely discordant element in the world of spirits mingles with the pure and harmonious. And thus is fulfilled the sacred text which says when speaking of these conditions, 'He that is filthy let him be filthy still: he that is righteous, let him be righteous still.' That is let there be a separation between the qualities of good and evil with the disembodied; and hence let those that are holy enjoy that without the warring of the evil elements, and let the unholy blend by the law of their affinities. For in the nature of their existence, in contrast with that of the unrighteous, it is justly written that there is an impossible gulf fixed since these extremes can in no wise be blended."

In this world the righteous and the unrighteous live together. But this is not to be after death. At that time the diverse elements are separated, and this division is permanent. So it was that Abraham was forced to deny the request of Dives, insignificant though it was. There was no way for Lazarus to cross the gulf to him, or vice versa.

The patriarch adds a further word saying, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus

evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke 16:25). In other words Dives in his lifetime was wholly concerned with living a selfish life even though he knew it must soon terminate. To him it was all-important to enjoy the temporal comforts of life, to dine sumptuously, and to dress in rich apparel. He gave no thought to the beggar who lay at his gate save to give him a look of scorn and permit his servants to toss him a few crumbs from his table. He had no thought nor compassion for the suffering of others. That was his way of life, and he gave no heed to the possibility that there might be compensations in the time to come. His philosophy of the earth was the survival of the fittest. So why should he complain now?

On that matter the rich man had to be content. He had entertained little hope that this request could be granted, and he pressed the matter no further. Nevertheless, he had one more favor to ask of which we will take note in the next chapter.

Chapter 41

The Rich Man's Plea for His Brethren

Next Dives made a request of another nature. Abraham in his first answer had used the words, "Son, remember." Thus we see that Dives had a memory. That memory brought him no consolation but only remorse and horror. In his present state of distress, he could visualize the time when his five brethren would join him in hades. They (having possibly shared his estate) were now engaged in doing what he had done during his lifetime. They were eating, drinking, and making merry—congratulating themselves on their good fortune. As for God who made possible those good things that they enjoyed, they gave precious little thought. Nor were they concerned that the fleeting days of life would soon be over and that they should be making some preparation for the life that lay beyond.

These things Dives knew full well. He contrasted his brothers' present pleasures with his own wretched state. He could not help but realize that he had set the pattern of self-indulgence and spiritual neglect for his own kin. They were merely following in his footsteps. Miserable as his own state was, the rich man anticipated further horrors when his brethren one by one joined him in hades. What kind of a meeting would it be? He knew full well that it could only be one of bitter accusation. People, when they reap the results of their folly, are quick to lay the blame on others. His brethren, in all likelihood, would have only curses and bitter recriminations for him.

The rich man had been altogether a man of the world during his lifetime. By his example, he taught his younger brethren that the only thing that really counted was to amass wealth on earth for their own enjoyment without regard to others. They had followed his example. Since it was too late to ameliorate his own unhappy situation, his request now was that Lazarus be sent to his brethren to warn them against sharing his fate.

"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment" (Luke 16:27-28).

Strange indeed is the fact that even some Christians have little interest in evangelizing the lost. *But that desire is dominant in the place least expected—in hades, the abode of the lost!* Yet, those in hades are denied this opportunity. However, the motive there is a peculiar one. It arises not because of love for the lost, for there can be no love in hades. But, it is the fearful anticipation of meeting the angry accusations of those whom they have influenced for evil in their lifetime. They dread the curses, the maledictions, the reproaches, and the obscene execrations that will shortly be poured upon them when the disembodied spirits, fresh from the physical world learn the truth of their future state. For it is their own sinful condition that makes hades so terrible rather than the abode itself. So for this reason its inhabitants would warn all those they have known in their lifetime to beware of coming to that place. The expression "misery loves company" has no application in hades.

Abraham responded to Dives' request with these words, ". . . They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). These words tell us much. The rich man and his family during his lifetime had access to the Scriptures. It is quite probable that the synagogue in their community had the Scriptures read every Sabbath as was the case in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-17). The nation Israel as a whole accepted the Scriptures as containing the way of salvation. It was a question each person had to decide as to whether or not to take them seriously and to apply them to his life. Obviously, the rich man had not considered the matter to be of sufficient importance to give it his attention. He followed the course of putting his creature comforts first and was principally concerned with those things which gave him immediate gratification. Dives knew only too well that his brothers were paying no more attention to the Scriptures than he had. Therefore, he said, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent" (Luke 16:30).

A fatal delusion! It is supposed by many people that the performance of prodigies or wonders before unbelievers will bring them to repentance. Miracles are indeed means of reaching many, but not those who are hardened in self-will or committed to self-indulgence.

Unbelief becomes a disease that destroys the natural faith poten-

tial of the soul, making it impervious to any evidence of God's miracle power. Dives claimed that if Lazarus would only return from the dead and go to his brothers, they would believe and repent. This seemed reasonable to him. But alas, Abraham dispelled that hope as vain. He replied, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

We see, therefore, that the word of God is the strongest power on earth to bring men to repentance. It is a seed which if it falls on good ground will bring forth fruit. But if it falls on rocky earth or on that containing thorns, it will not grow.

Indeed, another Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, did rise from the dead. The unbelieving Jews witnessed the miracle, but it did not make believers out of them. Although many of the common people believed, the rulers and priests were only angered. The record says, "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death" (John 12:10).

Dives' conversation with Abraham led nowhere. Each request he made had to be turned down. Prayer in hades obviously is not answered.

The Dead are Conscious and Have Faculties Corresponding to Those in Life

There are those who deny that the dead are conscious. There have been many attempts to prove that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is only a fable or an allegory—that what Jesus said had no basis in fact. If what the Lord taught means the opposite of what He said, we could scarcely know whether to believe anything He said were true. If this story of the rich man and Lazarus teaches anything, it shows that men are conscious after death. It is not an isolated passage. Many other Scriptures in the Bible teach this truth (Matt. 10:28; Luke 23:43; Luke 20:38; Phil. 1:23-24; II Cor. 5:6, 8; II Cor. 12:1-4; I Pet. 3:18-20; Rev. 6:9-11).

Man has not only a physical body; he is spirit also. Just as the body has five senses, so the spirit has corresponding senses. Dives in hades was quite conscious.

1. He was able to see. "In hell [hades] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off" (Luke 16:23).

2. He could hear. He heard what Abraham said to him (Verses 25-31).

3. He could talk. He begged Abraham that Lazarus might come to him.

4. He could taste. He wanted water applied to his tongue.

5. He could feel. He was tormented.

6. He had memory. Abraham said, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime . . ."

7. He had remorse. He wanted Lazarus to go and preach repentance to his five brethren.

The rich man in hades had consciousness, and his senses apparently were keen. How was it possible for the rich man to see, when his physical eyes had glazed in death? How could he taste, or feel, or hear when his body was in the tomb? The answer is simple: Just as the body has physical senses, so the spirit has spiritual senses. When a man dreams in his sleep, his eyes may be completely closed. His ears are deaf, but yet he sees and hears. A dream can be as intensely real to the mind as anything experienced when the body is awake. While a man sleeps, what he sees is real to him. What the spirit of man sees is just as real as what the physical body sees.

Sad was the picture of the state of the rich man. The situation of him who departs this world without God is indeed a desperate one. There had been no messengers at the gate of death to welcome Dives nor conduct him to a place of rest and peace. A discordant soul is attracted by the deadly magnetism of the place where other discordant spirits dwell. No true comfort is found in the compartment of hades where the wicked abide. There is no thirst-quenching water; there is nothing to rest or comfort the soul. Worst of all, it is a place where there is no hope.

There is no restoration, healing, or regenerative balm in hades. Nor did Dives express anticipation at any time in escaping the place. He realized that he was not fitted to enter the purity and holiness of paradise, which could only accentuate his own sufferings.

Chapter 42

Hades the Land of Night

Is hades a proper subject to be discussed from the pulpit? Should men be warned against entering that place? If in this life we are under obligation to warn our neighbors against dangers ahead, should we not warn them against those they may face in the next world? The number of years granted us in this life are pitifully few, and eternity stretches out infinitely long. Why should mankind be concerned only with these brief years to the ignoring of the endless years on the other side of time?

The world as a whole may not concede the deity of Christ; nevertheless, it respects Him as a benevolent person of history. They are agreed on Christ's essential goodness. His teachings, therefore, are worthy of the most sober consideration. ***Jesus tells us in no ambiguous terms that what we do in this world determines for good or ill our welfare and destiny in the world to come.*** Surely, it is no more than sanity that we should give heed to His warnings and prepare ourselves for that hour when we cross over from time into eternity.

If alertness to save human life from some disaster in this world is considered a worthy thing, why should we not give heed to those who would warn us against dangers that affect mankind's well-being in the world to come? Christ has solemnly given us the essential information about conditions that exist beyond the veil. If He is mistaken and has not given us a true report, then indeed we know not where to turn for the truth. He who lived and died and rose again is certainly the most qualified of all men who ever lived in this world to give us the true facts concerning the status of the human spirit after it has departed from this world. Moreover, if we believe that Christ spoke only truth, should we not honestly and soberly consider the implications of what He has said and act upon it?

It is through the physical body that we enjoy the blessings of physical life. Yet at death we lose this body. This being true He

who lives only to indulge the physical appetites, ignoring his spiritual nature, must at the hour of death lose all for which he has ever lived. As a disembodied spirit, the man still retains consciousness and memory, but has no means to gratify his former appetites.

Second, man's moral nature in no way changes at death. If he is sinful, profane, and given to uncleanness, if he nourishes hatred, envy, jealousy in his heart, he will feel the same emotions and passions after his spirit departs the body.

What of those who have heard the gospel and have had opportunity to accept Christ but have never responded to the call? What of them at the hour of death? Will there not at that moment when they realize they have lost all, come an overwhelming surge of remorse? They are at last face to face with the realities of eternity. There is no way by which they can go back to the world from whence they came. The irreversibility of death is an overwhelming thing. Those who in this life make serious mistakes and then realize that it is too late to retrieve their errors can know only in a faint way the terrible remorse of the departed soul that has put off salvation.

The rich man in hades clearly had this experience. He had access to the Scriptures; he knew what they taught; he understood the meaning of repentance, but in hades, it was all too late for him to act upon what he knew. There is a saying that where there is life, there is hope. What a terrible hour of awakening when the spirit must adjust itself to the awful truth that it is lost! The words of Jesus come to mind, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28).

It is a pleasant occupation of some to daydream on possibilities of the redemption of the lost in hades. It is natural to hope for the best when souls are at stake. But unfortunately the Scriptures give us very little on which to hang such a hope for those who have neglected salvation. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" the Scriptures tell us. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." If there is any hope in hades, the Scriptures have precious little to say about it.

There is one fearsome fact that we do not often hear mentioned, that seems to militate against redemption of the wicked, when they have passed beyond a certain point, apart from the evidence found in the Scriptures. It is that wicked, disembodied spirits exist

in this world and have a strong desire to inhabit human bodies (Luke 11:24-26). It is inconceivable that God created them in that wicked condition, so we are forced to face up to the truth that they were once righteous beings, but are now irremediably evil. Thus, we have strong independent evidence that the circumstance of disembodiment does not change a reprobate nature, but only fixes it permanently.

The doctrine of universalism which teaches that all spirits, even including the devil, will be saved, seems attractive to some people, but available evidence indicates that this is only wishful thinking and has no relation to reality. Belief in universalism is a blind refusal to recognize God's word that "the wages of sin is death."

It is clear that the unconverted at death are drawn to the abode of lost spirits. There they mingle with the myriads of the disembodied who have lived and died in their sins. Infidels have pictured the Christians' God as a monster who hears the cries of the lost in hades for help, which He could easily grant, but will not do so because He takes a delight in their suffering. This, of course, is a blasphemous reflection on God's benevolence and at the same time a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the real character and nature of sin. How could redemption be accomplished in hades?

Consider the kind of conversation of wicked spirits in hades. Can their utterances be any different from that in which they indulged while on earth—ridicule, sarcasm, unholy jesting, obscene allusions, hollow compliments, impure solicitations mingled with curses and blasphemies? How can good water come forth from an evil fountain? How can a lost sinner change from evil to good in such an environment? The rich man entertained no such hope.

Dives carried on a conversation with Abraham. Hence, we know that the inhabitants of hades have the capacity to converse with one another—but not to their edification. Perhaps at times they may express vain regrets for their predicament, but their general communications must be of an unholy nature.

A question sometimes asked regarding hades is whether lost spirits are tormented by physical flames. Obviously physical fire has no effect on spirit. The flames of hades are the fires of lust, evil desires, and perverted inclinations that cannot be quenched. Each spirit in hades is overcome by the ruling passions that therein prevail. Those coming into that region must quickly abandon themselves to the prevailing influences around them.

Hades provides no physical comforts, no soul peace, no surcease; it is a world of fantasy, illusion, and disappointment. The spirit

craves for things for which there is no means of satisfaction. The rich man desired a few drops of water to quench his burning thirst, but even so simple a request could not be granted.

In the vast congregation of disembodied spirits, it is easy to see how the evil of each member adds to the total aggregate. And thus the whole, mingled together becomes the prevailing law. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to see how these wicked spirits can be purified in hades. As far as we can see, the doctrine of purgatory has no scriptural basis, nor is it even logical.

Obviously, one of the most torturing elements of hades is the recognition of former friends on earth. Marietta Davis in her vision of hades stated that her greatest shock was meeting and recognizing those she had known before. She said, "Those spirits I had known on earth, and when I saw them there I knew them still." The rich man in hades recognized Abraham and Lazarus. He did not want to meet his five brethren who were following a course that would lead to the same place where he was.

A question sometimes asked is whether all lost spirits inhabit the same compartment of hades? It appears not. Apparently there are different spheres in hades in which the inhabitants congregate, according to their degree of evil. Some demons are more wicked than others (Luke 11:26). Deuteronomy 32:22 speaks of the *lowest sheol* (hades) indicating that it has various divisions. "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the *lowest hell* [sheol] and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains." Some spirits are more desperately wicked than others. Those of like nature would no doubt be more apt to associate with each other.

Truly God in His mercy desires to save men from the consequences of sin. But although salvation is freely offered to the world, and heaven's messengers plead with the sinner, millions still refuse, and millions more are content to speculate upon the great truths connected with redemption. And yet for every willing heart, God in heaven has a mansion prepared.

That God is a benevolent Creator is revealed in the very fact of His providence, which permits spirits of like natures and tendencies to congregate. Thus the opposite elements of good and evil are kept separate, so that one does not enhance the misery of the other, or detract from the bliss of the redeemed. For this reason, no unclean thing shall enter the Holy City that John the Revelator saw (Rev. 21-22).

Christ's description of Dives' experience in hades is a matter of the most solemn importance. *Every human being should make a resolution, if he never makes another, that he will not go to that place, for his spirit must at physical death go somewhere, and it is all-important that hades not be that place.*

Yet, no man can save himself by his own strength. He must flee to Christ, who has promised to accept all who come to Him, for He said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). There must be true repentance, not merely a desire to escape hades. Too late Dives knew that it took more than a superficial reformation. He knew it took genuine repentance.

Abraham's words implied that he who would enter paradise must be willing to make God's word the supreme rule in life. In the rich man's dispensation "the law and the prophets" were God's word to the people. Today God has given added light. We now have the New Testament as our heritage. It includes the words of Jesus, who said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

We must be born again. Our natures must be changed. Our unconverted nature has only one tendency, and that is downward and sinward. Those who yield themselves to their unregenerate natures are drawn deeper and deeper into the toils of evil until their inclinations become altogether unholy. To die in this condition means that the person will go to that region in which his nature has an affinity. He will be attracted to the prevailing element to which his fallen nature responds.

Part 8:

Christ Teaches His Apostles

Christ Teaches His Apostles

A study of the life of Christ would be incomplete without a glimpse of the training He gave His disciples. We have seen from our previous study how Jesus continually answered questions with another question. In this section Jesus asks His disciples two momentous questions. Peter's reply to the second, "Whom say ye that I am?" will always be remembered as the "Great Confession."

Until the day of His arrest, Jesus warned His disciples of His impending crucifixion. Unbelieving, they continued to think of a glorious, earthly kingdom and the individual roles they would play in it. Knowing also, that there would be many weak members in the Church, Jesus took time to instill in the minds of the disciples their obligations to these weaker brothers.

We close this study with the story of a rich young ruler who wanted to become a follower of Jesus. When Jesus explained the cost of discipleship, we see the young man turn away. Even with all his riches he found the price too high to pay.

Chapter 43

The Great Confession

> "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:13-19).

It was shortly after Jesus fed the four thousand that He and His disciples made the trip north to Caesarea Philippi. The city had a long history and had experienced many vicissitudes. Recently it had become the capital of Herod-Philip, and had been renamed in honour of him and Emperor Tiberius. It lay just beyond the border of Galilee at the base of the beautiful Mt. Hermon. From there spring forth the waters of the river Jordan.

It was here that Jesus found the retreat that He had so long desired, and He then addressed Himself to the task of giving special instruction to His disciples. The Lord realized His own days with them were numbered and that He must lose no time teaching them certain things they had to know if they were to carry on His work successfully after He left them.

Apparently Jesus did not go into Caesarea Philippi itself. It had nothing to offer but the poor mimicry of Roman culture. Somewhere in the vicinity at a secluded spot, perhaps in view of majestic snow-covered Hermon silhouetted against the sky, His disciples

halted. After a time of prayer (Luke 9:18), Jesus looked earnestly at His disciples and propounded to them two momentous questions. The first question was, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" The disciples told the truth, and they were compelled to admit that men as a whole had not accepted Him as the Messiah. People in general regarded Him as a prophet. Some, echoing the guilty conscience of Herod had declared that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Others saw in His stern denunciation of sin the voice of Elijah. Nevertheless, the people who were looking for a warrior-Messiah did not see in Jesus the marks of His Messiahship.

But the Lord came to His second question—and had it been answered differently the destiny of the world might have been changed. The mission of Christ might have failed and we would have never known the message of Christianity. The second was simply this—"But whom say ye that I am?" This was a searching and a momentous question.

It is interesting to note the previous confessions of the various apostles. Once Andrew had said to Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). Philip had declared to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael when he had seen Jesus had said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:49).

And after Jesus walked on the sea the disciples had exclaimed, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33).

And still again in Capernaum Peter had declared, "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, Son of the living God" (John 6:69).

But most of these declarations had something tentative in them. In this utterance in which Peter spoke for the apostolic band, there was an element of certitude. The prompt and unwavering answer carried the ring of absolute conviction. It was the great confession that Jesus was none other than the long-awaited Messiah who was to redeem Israel. Other disciples had also supposed He was the Messiah, but when He deliberately evaded the opportunity to receive the kingship and fulfill what they imagined was the true ideal of the Messiahship they were disillusioned and left Him. The Twelve, on the other hand, even though Jesus seemed to have failed to fulfill their Messianic expectations, still clung to their faith in Him as the Saviour of Israel.

The answer of Peter was of transcendent importance. Jesus

had not inquired to find out what the chief priests and the Pharisees had thought about Him. Clearly they believed He was an impostor and a religious mountebank. By way of contrast the people believed He was a prophet. They had great admiration for His teachings, and wondered at His miracles. But the question in Christ's mind was what His chosen apostles thought of Him. And impetuous Peter, without a moment's hesitation not only ascribed to Him the title of Messiah, but also the Son of God.

Jesus received the confession with exultant rapture. And with solemnity ratified it saying, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Here was a revealed fact that no man can acknowledge Jesus as Christ save those to whom the Spirit of God reveals this great truth. This explains why the proud critic, the philosopher, those wise in their own eyes, fail to be convinced of the deity of Christ even when the proofs are infallible, for they approach the matter in their human wisdom rather than humility and the great truth is withheld from them, as Jesus said at another time:

> "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:25-27).

In answer to the great confession Jesus made some remarkable statements, around which controversy has raged for the centuries. It was a promise that the Church, founded upon the great confession, should be unconquered by the powers of hell; but in the person of its representatives it should have power to open and shut, bind and loose, and that power faithfully exercised on earth should be ratified in heaven.

Yet of all the sayings of Christ this is the one that has been most surely abused. David Smith in *The Days of His Flesh* makes these pertinent remarks on the matter:

> "It is the Papacy's grand proof-text; and it is surely no less a tragedy, a pathetic evidence of human perversity that on the saying of Him, who combatted the priestcraft of His day even unto death, a new priestcraft should have been built,

more enduring than the old, more widespread in its dominion, and more malign in its influence. Suffice it to observe that the Romanist interpretation is sanctioned by none of the great fathers. Origen insists that the promise was not made to Peter alone, but to every disciple who joins in Peter's confession. St. Chrysostom holds that the rock was not Peter, but Peter's faith, 'the faith of his confession.' "

It may well be said that the words of Jesus meant that even though He was the light He granted the disciples to be the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). And likewise as He was the rock, so they too would become rocks in the foundation.

The Bible teaches that the Church is a living temple built of living stones. Peter quoted from the old prophets, telling of this temple of living stones:

> "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Peter. 2:4-5).

In a sense, Peter by his confession became the first stone to be built into the edifice. Others would follow him and become a part of the structure. But that Peter would become the foundation is of course ridiculous. Christ is the foundation, though Peter, as well as all the disciples, had a part in it:

> "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

That Peter was not the sole recipient of this promise is clearly seen from Matthew 18:18 in which the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which included the power of binding and loosing, were given to the other apostles as well as Peter.

To Peter the promise had a singular fulfillment. It was he who on the day of Pentecost opened the doors of the Christian Church to 3,000 Jews who were converted through his sermon. And it was also he who at the house of Cornelius admitted the first Gentiles into the privileges of Christian fellowship (Acts 10; 15:7).

But the promise has a far wider scope than just to Peter. It is given to the Church, but only as she abides in the unity of the Body of Christ.

One more circumstance should be mentioned concerning the promise that Christ gave which was miserably perverted by the medieval church. In Old Testament days all believers went to hades, or sheol at death. Even Jacob and David went to sheol (Gen. 37:35), although not to the same compartment as the wicked (Luke 16:19-31). But at the resurrection of Christ paradise was no longer left in sheol, but was transferred to the third heaven (Eph. 4:8-10; II Cor. 12:1-4). Therefore, the departed saints of the New Testament era do not go to hades, but ascend to the third heaven, for now being "absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8). Thus it can literally be said that the "gates of hades" do not prevail against the believer, for he will never pass through them. Alas, that the medieval church perverted this to mean that the believer at death goes to torment in the fires of purgatory until enough masses have been said for him to escape.

Jesus cautioned His disciples that the time had not yet come for them to reveal this great truth. The people were too ignorant of all that it meant. He was their Messiah but He was not the Messiah of the popular conception. After His resurrection they would fully understand and then they would preach it as the central truth of their message.

Christ Foretells His Death And Resurrection

> "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:21-23).

It was a happy moment for Christ when He knew that the disciples had recognized who He really was. But although they knew that He was the Son of God, He also realized that they had little conception of the way His mission to this world was to be carried out. He had to begin to disabuse their minds of their earthly hopes for a kingdom of outward splendor. Jesus had already hinted at the fact that death awaited Him (John 2:19; 3:14) but the disciples had missed the meaning altogether. Then in plain speech He told the disciples what would happen to Him, how that He

would be rejected by the rulers, be killed and would arise on the third day.

But the human mind has a peculiar capacity for rejecting what it does not want to believe. The announcement fell like a thunderbolt on the ears of the disciples. This prediction was alien to every conception of the mission of the Messiah. The matter of His resurrection from the dead was something so mysterious that they questioned among themselves what it could possibly mean (Mark 9:32).

The impetuous Peter thought he understood and felt it was his duty to set the Lord right. Aghast over the announcement, Peter took Him aside and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Although it was an ill-advised speech on Peter's part, Jesus knew it had been prompted by love. But for that reason it distressed Him even the more. Although Jesus knew what His mission called for Him to do, His flesh shuddered before the prospect and the temptation had ever been for Him to choose an easier way. The devil had presented the temptation in the wilderness. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). Jesus recognized the voice of Satan speaking through the lips of Peter with the importunity of tender affection.

Much as He loved Peter, Jesus recognized the seriousness of the temptation and saw a severe rebuke was necessary, and He said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." It is remarkable that a few minutes before Peter had spoken by divine revelation, but had now come under the influence of Satan and had become his tool to such a degree that Jesus in answering him did not address Peter, but Satan instead! This shows—if it does not fully explain—that ministers may speak great truths under the anointing of the Spirit of God, and yet because of human pride or carnal bias in their thinking, of which they are not aware, become the tools to propagate some absolutely unscriptural teaching which divides and mars the Body of Christ. And as Peter, they will hold on to it with blind tenaciousness and preach it with great vehemence as long as they live, thus substantially reducing the amount of good that they might do.

The fact was that the strength of Peter's argument lay in his great love for Jesus, and he thought that what he was saying was honouring Christ. But actually it was inspired by Satan, and Jesus had to rebuke him and tell him that his doctrine was the doctrine of Satan. Even so, Peter was not convinced; nor could he com-

prehend what Christ was telling him. Neither did he understand until after the resurrection when the course of events at last opened his eyes.

Chapter 44

Who Is the Greatest?

After the vision of the transfiguration and the healing of the demoniac boy (considered elsewhere), Jesus and His disciples who were at the utmost northern limit of Palestine began to retrace their steps southward. Despite the fact that Jesus had clearly explained that His forthcoming trip to Jerusalem was not to accept the kingdom, but to be rejected and killed, His disciples did not seem to understand. They could not see Christ dying and being taken from them. Therefore, they were compelled to assume that His words on this matter were figurative and not to be taken literally.

The disciples did appear to realize that some profound development in the ministry of Christ was about to take place, but they believed this would result in the ushering in of the Messianic kingdom. That expectation, therefore, produced the very opposite effect to what it should have had. Instead of being motivated to self-denial and humility, their thoughts became focused on the glorious kingdom and the individual roles that they should play in it. Judas no doubt saw himself as the treasurer of the kingdom's finances. Others remembering the preference shown James and John at the Mt. of Transfiguration, were moved to jealousy, and they disputed among themselves as to which should have the greatest position. Although the Lord knew what they were saying among themselves, He took no apparent notice of the matter at the time. But when they reached Capernaum Jesus asked them what they had been disputing about on the way:

> "And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and

servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (Mark 9:33-37).

For once Peter had nothing to say, and neither did any of the other disciples. Shame kept them silent. Jesus then sat down and showed them that he who would be first should be the servant of all. Then to illustrate His lesson on humility He called to Him a little child, perhaps Peter's, and taking him in His arms warned them that unless they should become as humble as a little child they could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. A child is a stranger to ambition and the selfishness that it breeds. The motive that possessed the disciples was wrong. True, in the sight of the world that which makes a man great is his superiority over others. The concept of greatness in the kingdom of God is altogether different. Greatness is determined by a willingness to serve others—even those who are the weakest and the most despised. Jesus concluded His admonition by saying, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me."

The Rebuke of Sectarianism

"But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me" (Mark 9:39).

The words "in my name" perhaps called to John's mind an incident that had occurred, probably when he and James were on a preaching tour. John desired to change the subject as to who was the greatest, and also to show Jesus that even if they merited censure they were busy promoting the Master's interests.

They had met an unknown worker who was doing the same work they had been engaged in, that is, casting out devils in Jesus' Name. This had immediately raised their suspicions. They asked the man whether he had the proper credentials. If not, he must cease his ministry until he secured them. Were not James and John leaders in the apostolic party? Surely any outsider who might engage in the ministry should get authorization from them first. They were ready to issue franchises to those who properly recognized their authority.

The spirit of James and John, alas, has never departed entirely from the Church. Ecclesiastics always look with displeasure upon any who seek to minister without their sanction. The Roman

church for example, boldly presumed that in the dispensation of its sacraments, any sacraments performed save by an authorized priest are null and void. Even marriage, which they recognize as a sacrament, when performed by a Protestant minister is considered invalid and any children issuing from such a union are declared illegitimate. Protestant churches, while not taking such an extreme position, not uncommonly refer to their denomination as the only true church and some go so far as to question the genuineness of the salvation of members of other churches.

The Lord, foreseeing that denominational barriers would arise and divide His people used this incident as a warning against sectarianism. He therefore revoked the interdict of James and John saying, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:50).

The motive behind this petty sectarianism is often selfishness. The religious establishment comes to be considered a sort of corporation which hands out franchises to protect the membership from competition. That there may be tens of thousands of souls perishing in the city without Christ seems not to have occurred to those engaged in such selfish protection of their interests. Is not this a great evil in the Church today?

Certainly Jesus spoke against sectarianism. The fact that the man was having success in casting out devils indicated that the anointing of God was upon him. Jesus noted also that "there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me" (Mark 9:39).

Chapter 45

Disciplines in the Church

Jesus, in teaching these things was coming to one of the most important truths which concerned His future church—the relation of the members one to another. Jesus knew that there would be many weak members in the Church, and He would instill in the minds of His disciples their obligation to them. He gave a parable that He, the Good Shepherd, who had ninety-nine in the fold, would go out into the wilderness for the lost one, and when it was safely back in the fold He would rejoice more over that sheep than all the others that had been safely in the fold. Indeed, even the angels of heaven rejoice over the salvation of the little ones, and some of them are their guardian angels:

> "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

Here the Lord gave a solemn warning to those who despised the weak or offended the "little ones which believe in me." "It were better," Jesus said, "that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea," than to offend one of the little ones. In view of these warnings one wonders at the callous disregard some professing Christians show to the weaker members of the Church, often manifesting a harsh and critical spirit to them. Behind each backslider there is often someone who has acted in a tactless and unchristian way toward him.

Nevertheless, Jesus would not have Himself misunderstood or men to suppose that there is no such thing as discipline in the Church. Christ has ordained a means by which offenders should be dealt with. He laid down certain rules for Church discipline. Although Jesus never ordained a particular form of ecclesiastical government, He realized that when a community of people lived together it was necessary to have certain rules governing conduct and human relations. Some would be very carnal Christians.

Others would appear to be saints but actually were far from being so. Unfortunately, these instructions that Jesus gave to a great extent have been ignored, or at least not followed. In their place men have developed human methods to force compliance to the ecclesiastical will.

These methods gradually evolved into the terrible tyrannies of the inquisition that brought a blot on the cause of Christianity that centuries could not wipe out—all done supposedly in the name of Christ. Did not the bloody inquisitors think they did God service in killing a heretic, since upon his death he could no longer propagate what in their opinion were unorthodox doctrines? But it is not our purpose to dwell upon these infamies of the centuries past. Let us consider the method that Christ introduced to preserve peace and order in His Church as recorded in Matthew 18:15-18:

> "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

To begin with, Jesus said that if our brother offends us we are to go to him alone and perhaps the difficulty can be worked out. Certainly in many cases this is possible. If this rule were followed many of the evil feuds that exist in the Church would never have continued. When reasonable men get together they can usually find a way to agree, and all are the happier.

Nevertheless, there are situations that arise in which there are conflicts of interest, and from these problems may arise which are not so easily worked out. When men work together it is necessary that they have *understandings,* so that each one knows what to expect of the other. But as time goes on it may be that circumstances change and one of the parties is tempted to break his part of the agreement, forgetting that the Scripture has said, "But he honoureth (him) . . . that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Psa. 15:4). In the world it is common for men to violate their word, and for that reason it is necessary to have policemen and courts of law to force such men to keep their agreements.

In the Christian community similar temptations arise. Some professors of religion violate their word when it seems convenient and they adjust their consciences accordingly as it may best serve their personal interests. If the ingredient of human ambition is also present, the result often ends in a flagrant violation of another's rights. The one who has kept his word thus finds himself sustaining an injury. What is he to do? Go to the courts? Jesus said, not so.

If the matter is serious, Jesus tells the Church that the next step is to take the case before two or three other brethren as witnesses and meet with the offender and see if the situation can be worked out. If so, the injured one must freely forgive his brother. Unfortunately, as Jesus knew full well, there are those who will not only justify themselves in their wrong doing, but will actually convince themselves that the other person is the one who is at fault. What to do then?

In any case the wronged person must not harbor bitterness in his heart. Moreover, if an offender asks forgiveness the injured party must be prepared to give it. But in case the other person will not listen the next step is to place the matter before the Church. If the offender hears not the Church, then the man may be considered "as a heathen man and a publican."

There the matter is to rest unless the man, driven by a passion to vindicate himself, becomes vindictive and actually causes trouble in the Church. The Church in medieval times forgot that she was a supernatural organism and stooped to methods ordained only to civil government—the use of physical force. God has established the means of preserving law and order both in the nation and in the Church, but the means ordained for each are entirely different. God has ordained spiritual means to be used in the Church—the power of binding and loosing. This power is not to be used for personal or selfish purposes, but to maintain order in the Church and to subdue lawless elements that cause confusion and division among God's people. Thus we see such means in operation where Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Ghost. Paul used it when false ministers brought unscriptural doctrines in the Church (I Tim. 1:19-20). He employed this method of discipline when flagrant immorality occurred in an assembly (I Cor. 5). Paul effectively understood the meaning of Christ's injunction concerning binding and loosing, and was not hesitant to use it when it appeared necessary. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18).

> "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:19-20).

Jesus is talking about His Church. One person alone does not comprise the Church. There is no place for hermits who claim to worship God in remote places, and who never come to the house of God. But if as many as two or three are gathered together in the Name of the Lord, there Christ shall be in their midst. The promise was prophetic—referring to the time when by the Spirit, the glorified Christ would be able to project Himself into any place in the world, no matter where.

And then Christ gave His disciples a great promise. If any two should agree as touching any one thing, it should be done of His Father in heaven. With such a promise, believers who walked with God would never experience defeat or failure. Supernatural power awaited their command to accomplish any task that God called them to do.

Chapter 46

The Rich Young Ruler

> "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:17-22).

As Jesus and His disciples left the place where He had blessed the little children, a rather remarkable incident took place. A young man of importance, for he was a ruler of a synagogue and wealthy besides, came and knelt before Him. The young man had come to the conclusion that he was neglecting a great opportunity and had come to see Jesus at the house where He was staying. As he drew near he saw that Jesus and His disciples had already begun their journey. He ran to catch up, and when he did he knelt down at the feet of Jesus and asked Him a question: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

This was the same question that the captious lawyer had asked in the synagogue (Luke 10:25). It is possible that the young man, a ruler of a synagogue, had heard the matter talked around and in his heart there came a longing that he too might get an answer from Jesus. As chief of a synagogue he apparently was a Pharisee, but one of a nobler sort than most of those who belonged to that sect. The young ruler had meticulously obeyed the commandments of the Law, and like Saul of Tarsus in the days of his ignorance he

considered himself blameless. Yet the young man was still unsatisfied, and for that reason he had brought the question to Jesus.

There was something appealing about this youth, who although young and distinguished seemed so earnest about his soul. Jesus looked upon him and loved him.

Yet there was much in his question that was objectionable. He believed that by doing something great, by performing an act of heroism, or keeping some extraordinarily difficult commandment, he might thereby qualify to receive eternal life. Moreover, the young man in addressing Him had not spoken in the style ordinarily accorded a rabbi, but as deity. Did the young man really believe that? Jesus said, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."

Jesus would not accept the title "Messiah" in the false sense that the people would ascribe it to Him. Neither would He accept the title "good" in the sense that He was a "good man," but no more than man. Nevertheless Jesus continued "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). This reply was a little disconcerting, for the youth had not expected an answer so simple. But then he asked, "Which?" He could not suppose that the Lord referred merely to the Ten Commandments. But Jesus replied naming those in the Second Table.

To this the young man replied, "All these have I kept from my youth up." (Luke 18:21). No doubt he had kept them to the letter, as all godly Israelites tried to do; but of course he knew little of the spirit behind those commandments that Christ had taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus looked upon him, loved him and desired him to be His disciple. But in order for him to do that he first had to pass the test which He had given to His other disciples, so He said:

> "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me" (Mark 10:21).

Some believe that Jesus did after the manner of the rabbis, and that He stepped forward and kissed his brow. The young man was one of those who was not content with the commonplace. He would aspire after the heroic. But Jesus would show him there was a price to be paid. Let him sell all he had, give to the poor and come and follow Him. This was a severe test indeed and it staggered the young man. What of his wife? What would his parents think? What

would all his friends think? He was a wealthy man and he recoiled from the sacrifice. He thought that he desired life more than anything else, but apparently there was one thing that he prized more. "And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich" (Luke 18:23).

Tradition has certain things to say about this young man. It is said that he was the Barnabas of Acts 4:36-37. Whether or not he was, we hope that there was a better end to the story of this young man than is recorded.

The failure of the young man to meet the test brought a sadness to the party. And Jesus, as He looked around made a comment that startled all the disciples. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" This amazed the disciples, but the Lord refused to qualify His statement and rather added a proverb. "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24-25). This struck the ears of the disciples like a thunderbolt out of the blue. It ran contrary to everything they hoped for or expected. It had been their hope that with the coming of the Messianic Kingdom, they would get something in return for the sacrifices and hardships they had endured. They truly loved Jesus; nevertheless they looked for a reward in due time.

Staggered by the words of Jesus, they said among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" What about Abraham? Was not he rich? Did not David and Solomon have wealth and riches? And there was Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, but a believer in Jesus. The Lord retrieved them from their despair by saying, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." Yes, it was impossible for human nature in itself to make the sacrifice required by Christ, but divine grace makes all things possible. Peter, the spokesman for the twelve felt he had to ask a question. He said, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27).

His question, in view of Christ's words to the rich young ruler, must have been tinged with disappointment. It cut so deeply across the hopes of the disciples. Were all their sacrifices to be unrewarded? Was the hope that had lured them to give up their possessions and cast in their lot with Jesus to be only a delusion? Jesus might have rebuked Peter and shown him and his companions how much more they had received than they had given,

but He did not. He might have called attention to the fact that they had given up very little. Peter was only a poor fisherman; he had given up only his boat and net. Certainly it was little; yet it was all he had, and Jesus did not despise nor make light of his sacrifice. Instead, He spoke a gracious word of reassurance.

First, He showed them their future place in the kingdom. This was not for that time; it was to be fulfilled during the regeneration or millennium. During that age the twelve disciples would sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel:

> "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

Then He told them something more. He was not making poverty a universal condition to discipleship. He did, however, require that any disciple be ready to give up all for Christ's sake and the kingdom's without regard to any return. But he who willingly did so would not in the end be the loser. He would receive in this life a hundredfold in "houses" and "lands"—material things—and besides that, in the world to come eternal life:

> "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

The unfortunate thing is that few Christians fulfill the conditions of the promise. Too many disciples want the houses and lands first. They are not ready to make the supreme sacrifice. Perhaps they get what they want, but in the end they lose the spiritual reward. Nevertheless, some in their joy give all to Christ and sacrifice gladly that they might fulfill the calling of their discipleship. When God blesses such persons with material things it often comes as a surprise. Judas tried to sell his investment for thirty pieces of silver; he lost everything, both material and spiritual. Peter and the other disciples eventually became stewards of wealth, given by thousands of people. They did not lavish it upon themselves, however, but used it for the establishment of the infant Church and the evangelization of the world. "But many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10:31).

The Cruelty of Pilate

> "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-3).

As Jesus drew near Jerusalem, there were some who sought to warn him of Pilate! A company of Galileans had gone to Jerusalem to worship. They were evidently on a peaceful mission to present their offerings in the temple. It is possible that they were not cautious in their conversation. Galileans were always known to be ready to take part in any resistance to Roman tyranny. Apparently things that they had said got to Pilate and aroused his suspicions. Even while they were offering their sacrifices in the temple the soldiers of Pilate set upon them and cut them down, mingling their blood with that of their sacrifices.

At the same time Jesus noted another tragedy that had taken place at the Pool of Siloam in which eighteen persons had died. The Jews entertained a notion that when people met violent death it was an evidence of divine displeasure. On the other hand, if they were prosperous that was a sign of God's favor. Jesus wished to dispel these notions. While He did not deny that there was a providential aspect in escaping evil, nevertheless He denied that tragedy was a sign that the victims were worse sinners than others:

> "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

The above words were fulfilled forty years later when the walls of Jerusalem fell before the battering rams of Titus, with multitudes perishing and those surviving sent to the slave-markets of the world. They refused to repent, and they perished.

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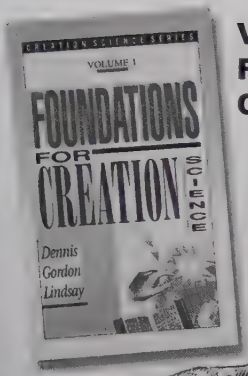

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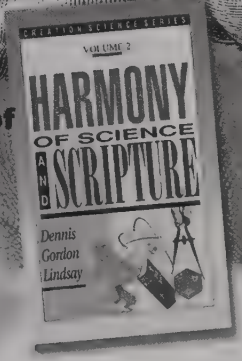

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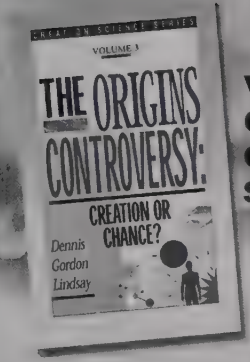

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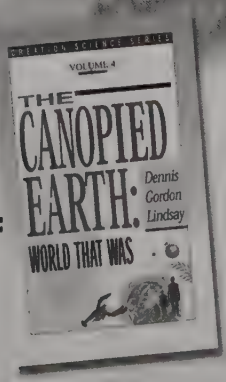

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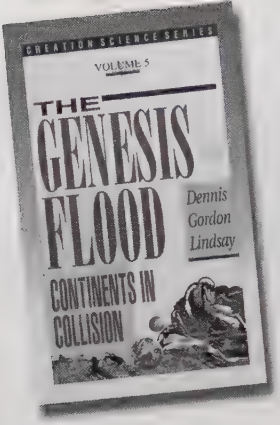

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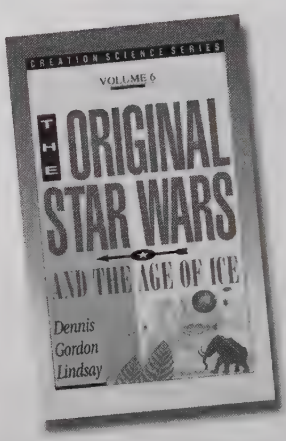

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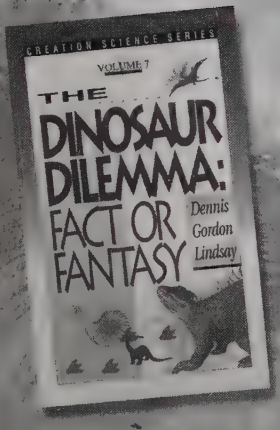

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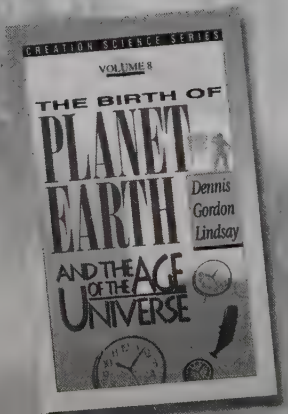

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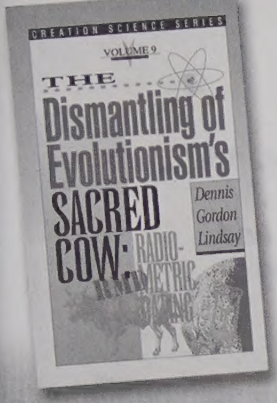

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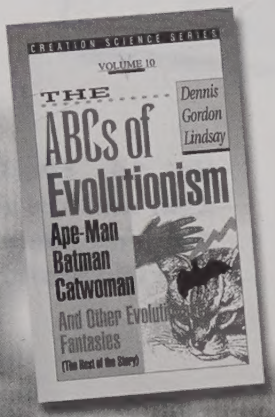

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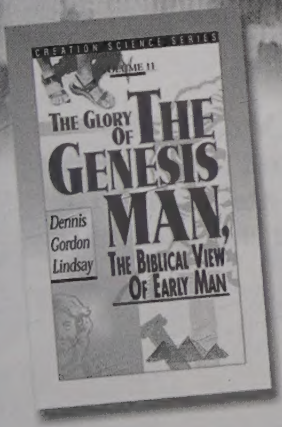

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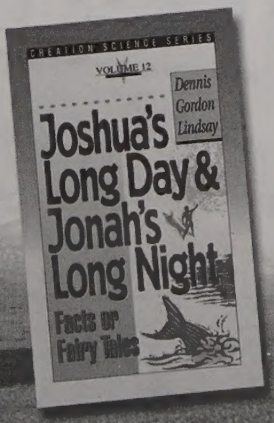

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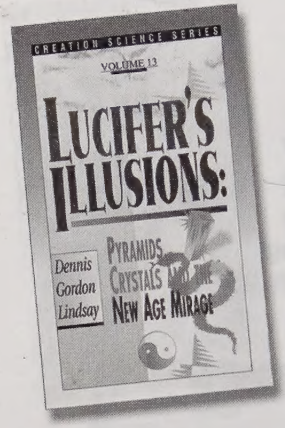

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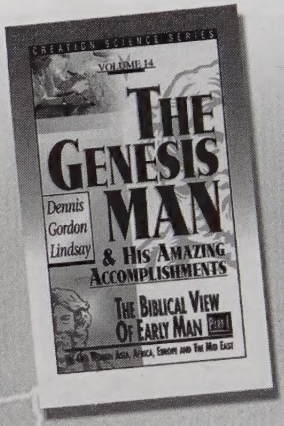

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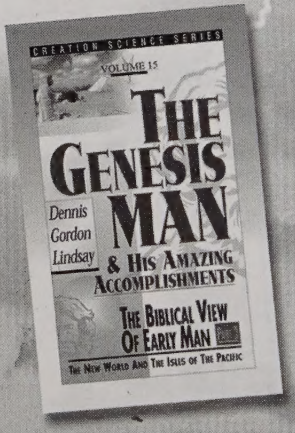

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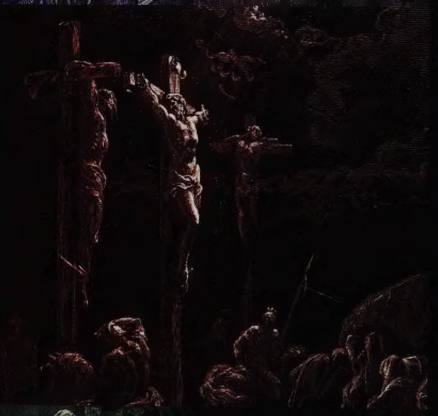

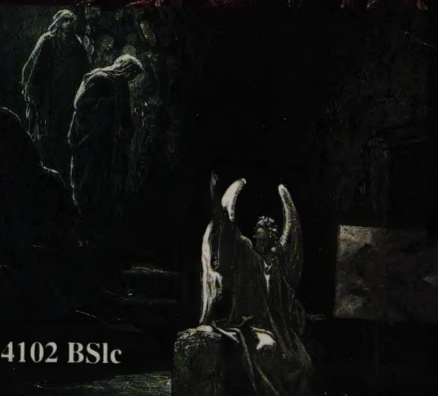

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